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PRECARIOUS PAST IN PREMODERN JAVA

WAYAN JARRAH SASTRAWAN

THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

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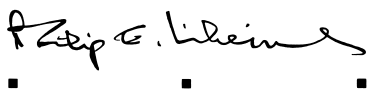

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The Precarious Past in Premodern Java

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Wayan Jarrah Sastrawan

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for Mum, Dad, and Harmy

sangke drəsnikang aśrupāta humilī tar wruh tibānyeng tulis
kagyat n ton ya ləbur taman wruh i wəkasning rekha śokang manah
ai sang Māruti toh tulung aku t asə sang Lakṣmaṇāri r wulat
ndah tonton ta ikeng tulis hana ləbur makweh surud tan katon
hāh tag wruh aparan uninya ta kunəng sangke laranya k hiḍəp
dhū ndyātah karikā kunəng hamənganing rekha n susuk ring hati

His tears poured out so heavily that he did not notice they were falling on the writing.
He was shocked to see that it had washed away, and his heart was sore,
For he did not know the text's conclusion.
"Ah, Māruti, come and help me! Come and see, brother Lakṣmaṇa!
Look at this writing. Some of it is lost, much has faded and cannot be read.
Ah, because of my troubled mind, I don't know what it says.
Alas, what could it have been? What remains of this text that pierces the heart?"

OLD JAVANESE *RĀMĀYAṆA* 11.33c–34d

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Veronica showed me how a joyful life is led.
Harmy has lit my way for thirty-five years.
Mum and Dad gave me everything.

CONVENTIONS USED IN THE BOOK

DATING

This book expresses dates in the elapsed Common Era, with January 1 as the first day of the calendar year. The Gregorian calendar is used for dates after its official introduction in 1582 of this era; the Julian calendar is used for dates before 1582. Where a year is given without any specification of era, it is implied to be in the Common Era. Where required by context, the abbreviation CE denotes the Common Era, while BCE denotes before the Common Era. The sources used in this book sometimes contain dates expressed in other eras, especially the Śaka Era that was widespread throughout southern Asia. The Śaka Era uses the lunisolar Indic calendar and maintains a seventy-eight-year delay relative to the Common Era. The first day of the Indic calendar year moves relative to the Gregorian calendar, oscillating back and forth around the March equinox. For convenience, Śaka years are converted to CE years by adding seventy-eight, with the implicit understanding that there remains a two- or three-month offset. For example, the elapsed Śaka year 800 would be denoted simply as 878 in this book, though in fact it ran from March 8, 878, to February 24, 879.

QUOTING SOURCES

Unpublished sources and edited primary sources in non-English languages are translated into English in the main text of the book and transliterated in their original language in footnotes. All the English translations presented here are my original work, unless otherwise stated. Edited texts are quoted

by the page number (and line number, if available) of the cited publication. Titles of inscriptions are followed in parentheses by the year they were issued. The original language of each quotation is also given in parentheses.

Prose texts are quoted by artifact reference and line number. For example, a quotation from a prose text inscribed on metal plates is followed by a reference such as (2v.3), which denotes the third line on the verso side of the second plate.

Verse texts are quoted by canto number and stanza number, whether or not they have been published. A reference such as (42.5) denotes the fifth stanza of the forty-second canto of a verse text. Verse texts without canto or stanza divisions are quoted by line number, which is simply given in parentheses. Within the quoted verse text, line breaks are indicated by a single pipe |, and stanza breaks are indicated by double pipes ‖.

Many of the primary sources from premodern Java that are cited in this book, including inscriptions and manuscript texts, are being progressively edited as an output of the research project DHARMA (the Domestication of "Hindu" Asceticism and the Religious Making of South and Southeast Asia), funded by a European Research Council Synergy Grant. In-progress versions of these texts are available on the project's online database, which at the time of writing is accessible at https://dharmalekha.info. Where a quoted source is or will be available on the DHARMA database, it is marked as such in the footnote.

TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSCRIPTION

Transliteration refers to the mapping of the graphemes of one writing system to the graphemes of another writing system. Transcription refers to the representation of the phonemes of one language in the graphemes of a writing system not normally used for that language. For example, the Modern Greek word μπορώ, "I can," is transliterated as *mporó* but transcribed as *boró*.

Most of the sources used in this book are written in scripts other than Latin. As far as possible, existing standards of transliteration into the Latin script have been followed for each language and script. Quotations in footnotes are transliterated into Latin script with proper nouns capitalized, except for quotations from Chinese. Non-English terms and quotations in the main text are transcribed in a manner that makes their pronunciation

and interpretation more accessible to English-language readers. For example, the Old Javanese toponym transliterated as *Vəṅkər* in footnotes is transcribed as *Wengker* in the main text.

Quotations from Chinese in the footnotes and in the main text are given in traditional characters followed by transliteration in Hanyu Pinyin (according to ISO standard 7098:2015). Chinese names and titles of works in the main text are transliterated in Hanyu Pinyin without traditional characters.

Indo-Aryan languages, such as Sanskrit and Pali, are most often written in scripts belonging to the Brahmic family. Quotations from these languages are transliterated according to ISO standard 15919.

Modern Indonesian languages are transcribed (not transliterated) according to the norms set out by the official spelling guides (*pedoman umum ejaan*) published by the relevant regional language authorities (Balai Bahasa). The guide for modern Javanese was published in Yogyakarta in 2006, and the guide for modern Balinese in Denpasar in 2013. Classical Malay is transcribed according to the spelling norms of Indonesian, published in Jakarta in 2016.

In the footnotes, Old Javanese is transliterated from various scripts according to the "loose transliteration" scheme described in the *DHARMA Transliteration Guide* (version 3), from which the book deviates only by capitalizing proper nouns. These spelling and transliteration guides are listed in the bibliography.

These are the languages and scripts most often used in this book. Occasional quotations from other languages are transliterated or transcribed according to the conventions of the publication from which they have been quoted.

Introduction

ACROSS THE GLOBE, for thousands of years, people have practiced history. Their ways of making sense of the past are much more diverse than what is taught in today's schools and universities. Historical practices may include keeping records, consulting evidence, writing about the past, telling stories about what happened, and explaining why things turned out as they did. The past can be gleaned not only from written documents but also from oral traditions, performances, and monuments. There are many ways to store historical data; ancient archives, for example, worked very differently from the regimented repositories of the modern nation-state. People have written about the past not just in academic prose but in ornate poetry, in fantastical tales, and in laconic chronicles. Historical knowledge has been passed down through revered traditions that are tailored to the needs of each generation. In almost every era and in almost every place, humanity has studied the past in multifaceted ways that go far beyond the well-honed techniques of the professional discipline of history. Today, the hegemony of the discipline blinds us to that diversity. We therefore miss out on the full richness of how our human past can be known, remembered, and treasured.

Why do people practice history in such diverse ways around the world? It is the creation, preservation, and transmission of texts that shape historical practices. A "text" here refers not only to written documents but also to spoken narratives, stories committed to memory, and other kinds of communication in language. The relationships between texts and history are contingent on many factors: how texts are recorded, their long-term survival, their genres and styles, and how they are reproduced over time. A community's knowledge of its own past relies in large part on the durability of its written records; these can be extremely perishable or very long lasting, depending on

their materials and environment. Historical records are usually produced by certain kinds of social organization, such as governments, corporations, or temples, while other types of institution may leave no written traces at all. Textual forms matter too; the literary genres of different cultures provide influential models for telling history. There are numerous ways to transmit these texts to wider audiences in the present and the future—for example, by the oral recitation of stories, theatrical performances, and the copying of manuscripts. These modes of transmission cause historical knowledge to change over time. In short, the distinctive mix of textual conditions in a particular society profoundly shapes how that society practices history.

This book explores the global diversity of historical practices through a case study of the Indonesian island of Java. How and why was history practiced in Java during the premodern period? The historical practices of this island's communities are in some ways recognizable to professional historians, but in other ways, they defy the discipline's expectations of how history should be done. The fundamental reason is that for people in premodern Java, the past was precarious. The perishability of written documents and the vicissitudes of social organizations drastically limited their access to historical records. As a result, chroniclers did not often cite their sources explicitly when composing new works of history. Their methods for compiling fragmentary information about the past could produce distorted sequences of events. People in premodern Java told true stories about real people, while depicting them as superhuman heroes like those of epic poetry. Historical traditions transformed as they were passed down through speech, memory, performance, and writing. This process of transformation led to wildly conflicting versions of the same events. These striking features of historical practice in premodern Java, which often challenge the sensibilities of modern historians, are best explained by the ways texts were created, preserved, and transmitted there.

The issues faced by people in Java are found in other places too, in myriad combinations. The two questions posed above are therefore linked; the factors that shaped historical practices in premodern Java can shed light on why historical practices vary throughout the world at large. Detailed case studies, like the one presented in this book, can meaningfully contribute to the broader mission of globalizing the study of historical practices. That mission involves reevaluating our assumptions about how and why societies practice history, by letting go of certain preconceived ideals of "what history is" in the abstract. Such ideals tend to be less universal than they claim. At

worst, they can assume that the peculiar trajectory of the modern Western discipline of history is the template to which everyone else should conform. It is more fruitful to delve into the plethora of ways that people have actually practiced history, by investigating the reasons for their varying situations and their contingent choices. By better understanding the worldwide diversity of historical practices, we can lay the groundwork for a properly global history.

GLOBALIZING HISTORY AT ITS HEART

The historical practices of premodern societies can inspire fresh perspectives on the basic premises of the discipline of history today. This involves globalizing history at its heart, not only by assimilating new sources using conventional methods but also by appreciating how the world's diverse historical practices can challenge the discipline's norms for the better. Even though global historians now engage with a wider range of subject matter than they once did, the field's methods still bear the imprint of the European sources they were originally designed to handle.[1] It is not enough just to make courteous gestures toward inclusiveness, such as making sure that every continent is prominently represented in teaching syllabuses. To truly globalize the discipline of history, its underlying principles must be reimagined in light of how people everywhere have engaged with their past. A promising first step is to explore all the possible relationships between history and texts that have existed in the past, not only those we are accustomed to in our history educations.

Examining the relationships between history and texts can help us rethink how we conduct source criticism, the methodological cornerstone of the discipline.[2] The empiricist strain within the discipline glorifies primary sources, that is, texts written not long after the events they describe, such as news reports or official correspondence. These proximate records are considered the paragon of historical evidence, more dependable than private

1. Daniel Woolf, *A Global History of History* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 18; Jörn Rüsen, "How to Overcome Ethnocentrism: Approaches to a Culture of Recognition by History in the Twenty-First Century," *History and Theory* 43 (2004): 118–29.

2. Mark Donnelly and Claire Norton, in their guide for history students at university, offer a nuanced discussion of the discipline's approaches to source criticism, covering the three issues mentioned here. Mark Donnelly and Claire Norton, *Doing History*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2021), 63–80.

recollections long after the fact, or recapitulations of traditional knowledge passed down over many generations.[3] The discipline also maintains the expectation that sources should be integral and citable wholes. The usefulness of a source depends on the extent to which it can be precisely identified and unambiguously referred to in historical research. Inchoate traditions, untraceable documents, and ephemeral rumors are therefore considered to be less reliable sources of history. Finally, the discipline has strong preferences for the textual forms in which historical knowledge should be expressed. The pinnacle of approved formats for professional history writing is a monograph book like this one, which uses a naturalistic prose style inspired by the modern realist novel.[4]

History does not necessarily have to relate to texts in these specific ways, and in much of the premodern world, it did not. Rather than being a set of universal scientific principles, the norms of disciplinary history are more reflective of how texts were created, preserved, and transmitted in nineteenth-century Western Europe. Canonizing these norms, as if they are the only proper way to do history, comes at the cost of invalidating the historical practices of the majority of people who have ever lived. A deeper understanding of the possible relationships between history and texts can lead to better methodologies for handling marginalized sources, such as oral traditions and Indigenous knowledges of the past.[5] This book starts from the premise that

3. The conventional notion of a hierarchy of source types, with an emphasis on the distinction between primary and secondary sources, is found in countless textbooks of historical method, such as those by Marc Bloch and Arthur Marwick. For a recent theoretical critique of the source hierarchy, see Jesse Torgerson's essay. Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, translated by Peter Putnam (Vintage, 1953), 48–78; Arthur Marwick, *The New Nature of History: Evidence, Knowledge, Language* (Palgrave, 2001), 152–94; Jesse W. Torgerson, "Historical Practice in the Era of Digital History," *History and Theory* 61 (2022): 37–63.

4. Hayden White, *The Practical Past* (Northwestern University Press, 2014), 11–18; Donnelly and Norton, *Doing History*, 66–67.

5. These methodological issues are encountered by historians working all over the world. Some of the most sophisticated treatments have come out of research on African historical practices and studies of Indian and Indigenous Australian histories. Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History*, Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture 22 (Cambridge University Press, 1992); David Henige, *Historical Evidence and Argument* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2005); Ruth Finnegan, *The Oral and Beyond: Doing Things with Words in Africa* (James Currey, 2007); Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India 1600–1800* (Permanent Black, 2001); Ann McGrath and Mary Anne Jebb, eds., *Long History, Deep Time: Deepening Histories of Place* (Australian National University Press and Aboriginal History, 2015).

the discipline of history will be vastly enriched, if only we can reimagine its methods to be more inclusive of all the world's ways of practicing history. It demonstrates the practical utility of this approach through each chapter's analysis of historical texts from premodern Java. It shows how the nature of these sources is shaped by the specific modes of textual transmission that they undergo, including the interweaving of written, spoken, and mnemonic modes. In doing this, the book promises a more adaptable kind of source criticism that can be tailored to the historical practices of any community.

Rethinking these issues can clarify long-running debates about the tension between textual form and historical content. There has been vigorous contestation about the influence of genre, narrative, and metaphor in the writing of history, and on the controversial question of the distinction between history and literature.[6] After a heyday in the late twentieth century, these debates have been left hanging unresolved. Some historians have turned away from textuality in favor of other concerns, such as spatiality, affect, and decoloniality, but there is still valuable work to be done to untangle our notions of textuality and history.[7] This book revisits questions about the textuality of history by prioritizing the concrete realities of historical practice. Rather than seeing the variability of texts as a threat to the validity of our knowledge of the past, it shows how dynamic textual forms are fundamental to the creation, preservation, and transmission of that knowledge. It thereby offers a productive reconsideration of the connections between history and literature that goes beyond policing the border between them.

The book treats texts not as passive repositories of historical data but as active forces that shape how a society practices history. Two aspects of textuality play an especially significant role in shaping historical practice: the

6. Louis O. Mink, "History and Fiction as Modes of Comprehension," *New Literary History* 1 (1970): 541–58; Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973); Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, 3 vols. (Chicago University Press, 1984–88); Nancy Partner, "Making Up Lost Time: Writing on the Writing of History," *Speculum* 61 (1986): 90–117; Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); F. R. Ankersmit, *History and Tropology: The Rise and Fall of Metaphor* (University of California Press, 1994); Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Richard T. Vann, "The Reception of Hayden White," *History and Theory* 37 (1998): 143–61.

7. Kristin Asdal and Helge Jordheim, "Texts on the Move: Textuality and Historicity Revisited," *History and Theory* 57 (2018): 56–74.

materiality and the multimodality of texts. These two aspects are generally underappreciated by conventional philology, which prioritizes the abstract ideal of the original creation over its real concrete manifestations. The material aspect of texts includes the type of medium on which they are written (for example, paper, stone, metal, or palm leaves) and the physical conditions in which they are stored. Material factors affect the long-term durability of documents and therefore have a profound impact on how history is practiced. Multimodality refers to the different modes in which texts can be conveyed and stored, such as writing, speaking, and remembering. The transmission of historical knowledge generally depends not only on a single textual mode but also on the interweaving of different modes together. Both materiality and multimodality play a central role in the book's exploration of how texts relate to history.

Contingency is of paramount importance in how people practice history. For when it comes to history, "there is no necessary mode of its pursuit, no single purpose for so doing, and no inevitable medium for its presentation."[8] In explaining why historical practices have developed in diverse ways, the book favors a concrete focus on textual processes in particular settings. It avoids explanations that rely on overarching abstractions, like a society's "historical consciousness," a people's "historical thinking," or a nation's "historical sense." While such holistic concepts can yield some general insights, they are always at risk of essentializing and homogenizing the complex realities of how people have engaged with the past.[9] At worst, they can perpetuate ethnic stereotypes and set up invidious dichotomies between the West and the Rest.[10] Historical practices are not the predetermined consequence of some intrinsic cultural essence. They are better understood as the result of intricate combinations of contingent relationships between history and texts, just as they happened to come about within particular communities over the centuries. We can come to grips with the global diversity of historical

8. Woolf, *Global History*, 513.

9. On the pitfalls of thinking about historical practice in such reified terms, see the contributions of Peter Burke and his interlocutors collected in Jörn Rüsen, ed., *Western Historical Thinking: An Intercultural Debate* (Berghahn, 2002).

10. For critiques of this civilizational binary, see Stuart Hall, "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power," in *Essential Essays*, vol. 2, *Identity and Diaspora*, edited and with an introduction by David Morley (Duke University Press, 1996), 141–84; Naoki Sakai, "'You Asians': On the Historical Role of the West and Asia Binary," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 99 (2000): 789–817.

practice by closely examining how real people have actually studied, thought about, and engaged with the past.

THE WORLD'S LARGEST ISLAND

The island of Java is a superb case study for exploring the possibilities for practicing history. Medieval Europeans believed that Java was the largest island in the world.[11] Today, it is the most populous island, with more inhabitants than Britain or Japan. It occupies a central position in the Indonesian archipelago, both geographically and economically. Java stretches over a thousand kilometers along an east-to-west volcanic chain, formed by the clash of the Sunda and the Australian tectonic plates. These volcanoes periodically enrich the island's soils with mineral nutrients that, together with Java's tropical climate, have provided prime conditions for a wealthy agrarian economy. For at least two thousand years, Java has hosted sophisticated civilizations with a high degree of social complexity. Gold treasure was hoarded by the rich, vast temple networks spread throughout the countryside, and a diverse body of literary works was passed down to the present day. By any measure, premodern Java was a materially and culturally prosperous place.

This book emphasizes the diversity of Java's cultures over the long term. As used here, the term "premodern Java" encompasses the many societies that lived on the island of Java and its small neighbors (like Madura and Bali) before the global onset of early modernity around 1500 CE. These peoples possessed a variety of ethnic cultures and there were profound social differences across the eastern, central, and western regions of the island. Over the centuries, the western part of the island came to be known as Sunda, as opposed to Java, reflecting the cultural distinctiveness of its inhabitants.[12] Disparate communities lived on the plains, along the coast, and in mountainous areas, and their cultural output was far from static during the millennium under consideration here. In Java, we can observe some general continuities in historical practice over the centuries but also considerable divergences in how those practices were manifested from one context to another. Therefore, the

11. Marco Polo, *Le devisement dou monde*, edited by Joël Blanchard and Michel Quereuil (Librairie Droz, 2019), §162.

12. Alex West, *Bujangga Manik, or, Java in the Fifteenth Century*, Bibliotheca Indonesica 39 (Brill, 2025), 11–14.

MAP 1. Java and neighboring islands in the premodern period. Produced by Gabriel Moss (2025).

label "premodern Java" does not denote a single essential culture belonging to a homogeneous ethnic group of Javanese native speakers. Rather, it refers to a broad range of historical experiences by the diverse peoples living on this island.

Several languages were used in premodern Java, most of which belong to the Austronesian language family. Early varieties of the island's major present-day languages (Indonesian, Javanese, and Sundanese) are attested in written documents; these archaic languages are called Old Malay, Old Javanese, and Old Sundanese. Similarly, on the neighboring island of Bali, an ancestral variety of the local language, called Old Balinese, was used in inscriptions between the ninth and eleventh centuries CE.[13] Of these early vernacular languages, Old Javanese has the largest surviving record in both inscriptions and manuscripts. A later variety of the language, called Middle Javanese, is found in texts written between the fourteenth and sixteenth century, but it is difficult to clearly differentiate Middle from Old and Modern Javanese on strictly linguistic grounds.[14] The Sanskrit language was used

13. The island of Madura lacks any surviving documents from this period, but we can assume that an early form of the Madurese language was spoken there.

14. Alexander K. Oglobin, "In Search of Middle Javanese," in *Language and Text in the Austronesian World. Studies in Honour of Ülo Sirk*, edited by Yuri A. Lander and Alexander K. Oglobin, LINCOM Studies in Austronesian Linguistics 6 (Lincom Europa, 2008), 34–45; Dwi Puspitorini, "Meninjau Ulang Bahasa Jawa Pertengahan" [Middle Javanese language

for literary texts, royal inscriptions, and religious rituals, drawing largely on South Asian models. Sanskrit was not an everyday spoken language in Java, but the vernacular languages borrowed a great deal of vocabulary from it.[15] The predominant script used on the island from the eighth to fifteenth century is called Kawi, a descendant of late southern Brāhmī script, though examples of northern Brāhmī-derived scripts such as Siddhamātṛkā were also used in this period.[16] Ultimately, Kawi developed into the various scripts used in Java in modern times, including standard Javanese script, mountain Javanese script, and Sundanese script. Two other foreign scripts, Arabic and Latin, were adapted for use in Java only after the period considered in the book.

The historical period covered in this book, beginning with the earliest written records and extending to the sixteenth century CE, is labeled "premodern."[17] Some scholars argue that it is improper to apply periodizations of European origin, such as "medieval" and "modern," to non-European societies.[18] Specialists of Java's history have tended to name historical periods after royal dynasties (for example, "Majapahit period") or the predominant religions of the time (for example, "Hindu-Buddhist period").[19] But these

revisited], *Frontier of Foreign Language Education* 4 (2021): 19–28; Agung Kriswanto, Dwi Puspitorini, and Titik Pudjiastuti, "The Middle Javanese Passive Prefix *ing-*," *Wacana* 26 (2025): 413–37.

15. The classic account of Sanskrit's role in premodern Indonesian cultures is by Jan Gonda. The work of Tom Hoogervorst reveals the lexical influence of Middle Indo-Aryan (Prakrit) and Dravidian languages on those of maritime Southeast Asia. Jan Gonda, *Sanskrit in Indonesia*, 2nd ed., Śata-Piṭaka Series 99 (International Academy of Indian Culture, 1973); Tom Hoogervorst, "Detecting Pre-Modern Lexical from South India in Maritime Southeast Asia," *Archipel* 89 (2015): 63–93; Tom Hoogervorst, "Lexical Influence from North India to Maritime Southeast Asia: Some New Directions," *Man in India* 97 (2017): 293–334.

16. Arlo Griffiths, "Early Indic Inscriptions of Southeast Asia," in *Lost Kingdoms: Hindu-Buddhist Sculpture of Early Southeast Asia*, edited by John Guy (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2014), 54.

17. Most of the evidence used in this book dates before 1500 CE. Chapters 4 and 5 examine two poems written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but they draw directly from narratives and genre conventions of earlier centuries so are properly considered part of the premodern tradition.

18. Daud Ali, "The Historiography of the Medieval in South Asia," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd ser., 22 (2012): 7–12; Alan Strathern, "Global Modernity and the Problem of What Came Before," *Past and Present* 238, Supplement 13 (2018): 317–44.

19. Other labels applied to this period in Java's history include the "classic" period (especially popular in Indonesian-language scholarship) and the "charter state" period. See N. J. Krom, *Hindoe-Javaansche Geschiedenis* [Hindu-Javanese history], 2nd ed. ('s- M. Nijhoff, 1931); George Coedès, *Les états hindouisés d'Indochine et d'Indonésie* [The Hinduized states

Java-specific schemes are not so useful for the comparative approach taken in this book, which seeks a more general understanding of historical practice through its Indonesian case study. By denoting this period of Java's history as "premodern," the book stresses its comparability with other contemporaneous societies. Reclaiming terms like "medieval" and "modern" from their Eurocentric origins allows us to include places like Java in broader discussions of the global/hemispheric Middle Ages and the early modern world.[20]

The earliest textual references to Java are over two thousand years old, and they appear in texts written far away from Java itself. These foreign accounts, dating from the second century BCE to the second century CE, include the Sanskrit epic poem *Rāmāyaṇa*, the Pali scripture *Mahāniddesa*, the Greek *Geography* of Claudius Ptolemy, and the Chinese chronicle *Han Records of the Eastern Lodge*.[21] These sources show that Java was known in antiquity throughout the western Pacific and Indian Ocean littorals, even if their descriptions of the island are often exaggerated, confused, and obscure. Indonesian participation in cross-continental networks is confirmed by archaeological research. Excavations at sites along the north coasts of Java and Bali have uncovered assemblages that span the final centuries BCE to the sixth century CE, which include rouletted ware of Indian manufacture or influence, gold-glass beads originating in Roman Egypt, and Chinese bronze

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of Indochina and Indonesia] (de Boccard, 1964), whose title was subsequently revised in the English publication as *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, edited by Walter F. Vella, translated by Susan Brown Cowing (Australian National University Press, 1968); Jan Fontein, *The Sculpture of Indonesia* (National Gallery of Art, 1990), 70; Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800–1830*, vol. 2 (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 780.

20. For the term "global Middle Ages" in general, see the introduction to the *Past and Present* Supplement. Alex West cogently argues that "hemispheric" is the preferable way to describe long-distance interactions before 1492 CE. Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen, "Introduction: Towards a Global Middle Ages," *Past and Present* 238, Supplement 13 (2018): 1–44; West, *Bujangga Manik*, 29.

21. Paul Wheatley, *The Golden Khersonese: Studies in the Historical Geography of the Malay Peninsula Before A.D. 1500* (University of Malaya Press, 1961), 177–84; Rosalind Lefeber, trans., *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, vol. 4 of *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki: An Epic of Ancient India*, edited by Robert P. Goldman (Princeton University Press, 1994), 142; L. de La Vallée Poussin and E. J. Thomas, *Niddesa: I. Mahāniddesa*, vol. 1 (Humphrey Milford, 1916), 154; Alfred Stückelberger and Gerd Grasshoff, eds. and trans., *Klaudios Ptolemaios Handbuch der Geographie*, vol. 2 (Schwabe, 2009), 730; Stephen G. Haw, "The Maritime Routes Between China and the Indian Ocean During the Second to Ninth Centuries C.E.," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd ser., 7 (2017): 67n104.

mirrors of the Han dynasty.[22] This archaeological evidence indicates that Java and nearby islands were involved in long-distance exchanges of ideas and material culture at the same time as they began to appear in Chinese, Indian, and Greek texts.

There are no surviving written records from Java itself until the fifth or sixth century CE. The island's oldest texts are a group of seven stone inscriptions found in the vicinity of present-day Jakarta. They commemorate the activities of a king called Pūrṇavarman who ruled a polity called Tārumanagara.[23] Their affinities with contemporaneous Indian panegyrics reflect the strong influence of Sanskrit cosmopolitan culture on Java during the first millennium CE.[24] South Asian inspiration is also visible in the oldest Hindu and Buddhist temple structures, along the north coast of Java and in the mountain sanctuary of Dieng, which date to around the seventh century CE.[25] There has been much scholarly debate about the precise nature of this Indic influence, the interplay of foreign stimulus and local agency, and the role of different social groups in this process.[26] Nonetheless, it is clear that writing came to Java in the early to mid-first millennium CE as part of a suite

22. Pierre-Yves Manguin and Agustijanto Indradjaja, "The Batujaya Site: New Evidence of Early Indian Influence in West Java," in *Early Interactions Between South and Southeast Asia: Reflections on Cross-Cultural Exchange*, edited by Pierre-Yves Manguin, A. Mani, and Geoff Wade, Nalanda-Sriwijaya Series 2 (ISEAS, 2011), 113–36; Ambra Calo et al., "Trans-Asiatic Exchange of Glass, Gold and Bronze: Analysis of Finds from the Late Prehistoric Pangkung Paruk Site, Bali," *Antiquity* 94 (2020): 110–26.

23. B. Ch. Chhabra, *Expansion of Indo-Aryan Culture During Pallava Rule, as Evidenced by Inscriptions* (Munshi Ram Manohar Lal, 1965).

24. Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (University of California Press, 2006); Daud Ali, "The Early Inscriptions of Indonesia and the Problem of the Sanskrit Cosmopolis," in *Early Interactions Between South and Southeast Asia: Reflections on Cross-Cultural Exchange*, edited by Pierre-Yves Manguin, A. Mani, and Geoff Wade, Nalanda-Sriwijaya Series 2 (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2011), 278–95.

25. Agustijanto Indrajaya, Sukawati Susetyo, and Véronique Degroot, "Note on Two Pre-Mataram Sites Recently Discovered Near Weleri, North Central Java, Indonesia," *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 105 (2019): 323–30; Julie Romain, "Indian Architecture in the 'Sanskrit Cosmopolis': The Temples of the Dieng Plateau," in *Early Interactions Between South and Southeast Asia: Reflections on Cross-Cultural Exchange*, edited by Pierre-Yves Manguin, A. Mani, and Geoff Wade, Nalanda-Sriwijaya Series 2 (ISEAS, 2011), 299–316.

26. Pierre-Yves Manguin, Introduction to *Early Interactions Between South and Southeast Asia: Reflections on Cross-Cultural Exchange*, edited by Pierre-Yves Manguin, A. Mani, and Geoff Wade, Nalanda-Sriwijaya Series 2 (SEAS Publishing, 2011), xiii–xxxi; Andrea Acri, "'Local' vs. 'Cosmopolitan' in the Study of Premodern Southeast Asia," *Suvannabhumi* 9 (2017): 7–52.

of cultural forms that were facilitated by long-distance contacts across the Indian Ocean.

From the early eighth century CE, we find evidence of state organizations in Java. Inscriptions on stone and metal show the existence of kings, a landed gentry, diverse specialized occupations, a formal judicial system, and intricate protocols for distributing revenue and labor. These documents, written mainly in the Old Javanese language, constitute one of the most extensive collections of documentary sources in premodern Southeast Asia, matched in quantity only by the historical records of the mainland empires of Angkor and Đại Việt. The substantial economic surplus of central Java was invested in ritual architecture, taking the form of monumental stone temples, which spread over the landscape in complex geographical patterns.[27] The UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Borobudur and Prambanan are the best-known examples of these monuments. Java was an artistically rich place at this time, with a flourishing tradition of sculpture in stone, gold, and bronze.[28] The island's social development did not go unnoticed overseas. Chinese annals record the wealth and influence of people from Java, whom they encountered through commerce, tributary relations, and networks of Buddhist Tantric masters.[29]

There were a number of separate states in Java at this time, of which the Mataram kingdom in central Java has left the most extensive traces.[30] Inscriptions associated directly or indirectly with Mataram form the bulk

27. Véronique Degroot, *Candi, Space and Landscape: A Study on the Distribution, Orientation and Spatial Organization of Central Javanese Temple Remains*, Mededelingen van het Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden 38 (Sidestone Press, 2009); Tyassanti Kusumo Dewanti, Eko Bastiawan, Kezia Permata, and Hedwi Prihatmoko, "Upkeeping a Religious Foundation from Time to Time: A Case Study of *Dharma i Salingsingan* (Ninth–Tenth Century CE)," *Wacana* 26 (2025): 438–86.

28. A. J. Bernet Kempers, *Ancient Indonesian Art* (Harvard University Press, 1959); Fontein, *The Sculpture of Indonesia*; Maud Girard-Geslen, ed., *Indonesian Gold: Treasures from the National Museum, Jakarta* (Queensland Art Gallery, 1999).

29. Iain Sinclair, "Coronation and Liberation According to a Javanese Monk in China: Bianhong's Manual on the *abhiṣeka* of a *cakravartin*," in *Esoteric Buddhism in Mediaeval Maritime Asia: Networks of Masters, Texts, Icons*, edited by Andrea Acri (ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, 2017), 29–66; Haw, "Maritime Routes Between China and the Indian Ocean."

30. Strictly speaking, premodern kingdoms in Java did not have their own names. Instead, they were referred to by the name of their core geographical territory (in this case, Mataram in the vicinity of modern-day Yogyakarta) or by the placename of the royal power center (for example, Majapahit in eastern Java).

FIGURE 1. Fine stone sculpture from eastern Java, dated around 1239 CE. Photographs by Isidore van Kinsbergen (1867) of (*left*) the front side depicting Gaṇeśa and (*right*) the rear side depicting Kāla. Public domain.

of Java's epigraphical record in the eighth and ninth centuries.[31] During the late eighth century CE, parts of western Indonesia were under the sway of a royal dynasty called Śailendra, whose members issued inscriptions as far north as Ligor in present-day Thailand.[32] Due to a lack of primary sources, many details about the Śailendra dynasty remain obscure, including where they were based and how they influenced politics in Java.[33] At the beginning of the tenth century, the Mataram kingdom asserted its authority over territories farther east, before altogether shifting its royal center to eastern Java in

31. Kōzō Nakada, *An Inventory of the Dated Inscriptions in Java*, Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko 40 (Toyo Bunko, 1982); Louis-Charles Damais, *Répertoire onomastique de l'épigraphie javanaise (jusqu'à Pu Siṇḍok Śrī Īśanawikrama Dharmmoturŋgadewa): Étude d'épigraphie indonésienne*, Publications de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient 66 (École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1970), 37–54.

32. Mark E. Long, *Voices from the Mountain: The Śailendra Inscriptions Discovered in Central Java and on the Malay Peninsula* (International Academy of Indian Culture and Aditya Prakashan, 2014).

33. R. E. Jordaan and B. E. Colless, *The Mahārājas of the Isles: The Śailendras and the Problem of Śrīvijaya*, Semaian 25 (Department of Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia and Oceania, University of Leiden, 2009); Anton O. Zakharov, "The Śailendras Reconsidered," Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre Working Paper Series 12 (Nalanda Sriwijaya Centre, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2012).

929 CE for reasons that remain unclear.[34] The mighty river systems of eastern Java allowed for intensive irrigated agriculture and improved transport links through the Java Sea to the rest of the world.[35]

The oldest surviving literature in the Javanese language dates from the period of emerging social complexity between the eighth and tenth centuries CE. The Old Javanese *Amaramālā*, a local adaptation of a famous Sanskrit dictionary of the same title, shows great enthusiasm to translate Sanskrit texts and concepts into Old Javanese.[36] Vernacular texts composed at this time include adaptations of the epic poems *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, religious treatises drawing on Buddhist and Hindu traditions, and compendia of cultural knowledge following the model of Indic *purāṇa* genres.[37] A refined literary culture in the Old Javanese language developed precociously in these centuries, overlapping with the appearance of French and Japanese written literatures around the same time.[38] These early literary texts of Java have not survived in their original physical forms, but only in recent manuscript copies that are no more than a few centuries old. Countless documents have been lost over the centuries, and what is available today is only a small fraction of what was ever written. The perishability of written

34. Boechari, *Melacak Sejarah Kuno Indonesia lewat Prasasti / Tracing Ancient Indonesian History Through Inscriptions* (Kepustakaan Popular Gramedia, 2012), 155–81; Wayan Jarrah Sastrawan, "Portents of Power: Natural Disasters Throughout Indonesian History," *Indonesia* 113 (2022): 21–23.

35. Jan Wisseman Christie, "Asian Sea Trade Between the Tenth and Thirteenth Centuries and its Impact on the States of Java and Bali," in *Archaeology of Seafaring*, edited by Himanshu Prabha Ray (Pragati, 1999), 221–70; Jan Wisseman Christie, "Water and Rice in Early Java and Bali," in *A World of Water: Rain, Rivers and Seas in Southeast Asian Histories*, edited by Peter Boomgaard (KITLV Press, 2007), 235–58.

36. Lokesh Chandra, "Chanda-Karaṇa: The Art of Writing Poetry," in *Cultural Horizons of India: Studies in Tantra and Buddhism, Art, and Archaeology, Language and Literature*, vol. 6, Śata-Piṭaka Series 390 (International Academy of Indian Culture and Aditya Prakashan, 1997), 140–242; Zakariya Pamuji Aminullah, "Rethinking the Name: The Problem of the Name *Candrakiraṇa* in the Oldest Javanese Prosody," *Wacana* 22 (2021): 535–57. A new critical edition and English translation of the *Amaramālā*, embedded within the later poetological compendium called *Candrakirana*, is in preparation by Zakariya Pamuji Aminullah (see "Conventions Used in the Book" in this volume).

37. Theodore G. Th. Pigeaud, *Literature of Java: Catalogue Raisonné of Javanese Manuscripts in the Library of the University of Leiden and Other Public Collections in the Netherlands*, 4 vols. (Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde, 1967–80), vol. 1.

38. Shuichi Kato, *A History of Japanese Literature: The First Thousand Years*, translated by David Chibbett (MacMillan, 1979), 27–88.

texts in the island's tropical environment is a key theme running through this book, because it profoundly shaped how history was practiced there.

Java's society and culture continued to develop from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries CE. Most extant records of this period tell us about communities and kingdoms in the Brantas River valley in eastern Java, though there is fragmentary evidence of other states in the western part of the island.[39] Some of Java's finest sculpture and poetry was produced in this period.[40] From the middle of the thirteenth century, Javanese kingdoms began to assert political dominance over the neighboring islands of Bali and Sumatra. Partly in response to this assertiveness, the Yuan emperor Kublai Khan sent an expeditionary force in 1293 CE to invade eastern Java and subdue its powerful king, only to find that he had already been deposed by a local enemy.[41] Java continued to grow in wealth and stature after the founding of a new royal center at Majapahit. Thanks to the historical texts that survive from this time, the fourteenth century has been remembered as a golden age in Java's history.[42] While this romanticized image is often taken far beyond what the evidence can support, it is clear that toward the end of the premodern period, people in Java had established one of Asia's great civilizations.

39. Aditia Gunawan and Arlo Griffiths, "Old Sundanese Inscriptions: Renewing the Philological Approach," *Archipel* 101 (2021): 131–207.

40. P. J. Zoetmulder, *Kalangwan: A Survey of Old Javanese Literature* (Martinus Nijhoff, 1974); Fontein, *Sculpture of Indonesia*.

41. David Bade, *Of Palm-Wine, Women, and War: The Mongolian Naval Expedition to Java in the 13th Century* (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2013); Hsiao-chun Hung, Hartatik, Tisna Arif Ma'rifat, and Truman Simanjuntak, "Mongol Fleet on the Way to Java: First Archaeological Remains from the Karimata Strait in Indonesia," *Archaeological Research in Asia* 29 (2022): 100327.

42. The image of Majapahit as the center of a powerful archipelagic empire has a long history. Notions of past Majapahit greatness were recounted to the Portuguese visitor Tomé Pires in the early sixteenth century. Memories of Majapahit played a major role in Javanese and Balinese historiography of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The idea of a mighty Majapahit empire was validated by colonial-era scholarship of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. After Indonesia's independence in 1945, the Majapahit empire was adopted as a cornerstone of national historiography, in which this fourteenth-century kingdom was celebrated as a precursor and a role model for the modern Indonesian nation-state. S. Supomo, "The Image of Majapahit in Later Javanese and Indonesian Writing," in *Perceptions of the Past in Southeast Asia*, edited by Anthony Reid and David Marr (Heinemann, 1979), 171–85; Helen Creese, "In Search of Majapahit: The Transform of Balinese Identities," in *To Change Bali*, edited by Adrian Vickers and I Nyoman Darma Putra with Michele Ford (Bali Post, 2000), 15–46; Marieke Bloembergen and Martijn Eickhoff, *The Politics of Heritage in Indonesia: A Cultural History* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 97–163.

FIGURE 2. Brahu brick temple, near the Majapahit royal capital, eastern Java (built circa fourteenth century CE). Photograph by Anandajoti Bhikku (2017). CC BY 2.0.

The early sixteenth century was a time of fundamental change in Java. The two major kingdoms on the island, one centered on Majapahit in the east and another centered on Pakuan in the west, rapidly lost authority to smaller coastal polities like Cirebon, Demak, Gresik, and Surabaya, many of which were ruled by Muslims.[43] From the extremely fragmented historical record of sixteenth-century Java, we can discern major discontinuities of language, religion, institutions, and politics.[44] This period also saw the first emergence of certain types of community in the island's historical record,

43. H. J. de Graaf and Th. G. Th. Pigeaud, *De eerste Moslimse vorstendommen op Java: Studiën over de staatkundige geschiedenis van de 15de en 16de eeuw* (Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 19–71.

44. The only contemporary source that sheds any significant light on conditions in Java at this time is the *Suma Oriental* (Account of the East) of the Portuguese scrivener, accountant, and apothecary Tomé Pires. This account is much more extensive and reliable than other sixteenth-century Portuguese reports on Java, as it is based on Pires's own observations and discussions with Javanese people during his residence in Melaka between 1512 and 1515. Armando Cortesão, ed. and trans., *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires, an Account of the East, from the Red Sea to Japan, written in Malacca and India in 1512–1515, and The Book of Francisco Rodrigues*, 2 vols. (Hakluyt Society, 1944), vol. 1, 166–99; Rui Manuel Loureiro, ed., *O manuscrito de Lisboa da "Suma Oriental" de Tomé Pires (Contribuição para uma ediçião critica)* (Institvto Portvguês do Oriente, 1996); Rui Manuel Loureiro, *Suma Oriental* (Centro Cientifico e Cultural de Macau, 2017).

including the Islamized port cities that drew power from their involvement in maritime commerce.[45] Over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, these transformations gradually produced the social landscapes of early modern Java.[46]

Simply put, premodern Java is one of the most underappreciated contributors to global history. This makes it a rewarding case study for exploring why historical practices develop in such diverse ways around the world. Java's historical practices were remarkable and distinctive, but they have received little scholarly attention outside specialist circles and barely feature in recent syntheses of global historiography.[47] The island has been home to complex societies that preserved and transmitted knowledge of the past for many centuries. Their economic and administrative robustness produced one of the most extensive surviving historical records in early Southeast Asia. The interplay of literacy, orality, and memory has profoundly shaped the development of historical traditions on the island. Paying closer attention to premodern Java can therefore give us new insights into the multitude of possible relationships between history and texts.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This book explores the historical practices of premodern Java and considers why history is practiced differently in different contexts, by comparing its main case study with other societies around the world. Centering one case study in this way offers the benefits of an intercultural comparative approach

45. Denys Lombard, *Le carrefour javanais: essai d'histoire globale*, vol. 3 (Éditions de l'École des hautes études en scienes sociales, 1990), 18–35.

46. The works of M. C. Ricklefs provide an authoritative account of the social transformations in Java during the early modern period. See especially M. C. Ricklefs, *War, Culture, and Economy in Java, 1677–1726: Asian and European Imperialism in the Early Kartasura Period* (Asian Studies Association of Australia in association with Allen & Unwin, 1993); M. C. Ricklefs, *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries* (EastBridge, 2006).

47. Two important exceptions to this pattern of neglect are the discussions of Javanese historiography in Daniel Woolf's *A Global History of History* and in the *Oxford History of Historical Writing* series. Woolf, *Global History*, 416–22; Geoff Wade, "Southeast Asian Historical Writing," in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, vol. 3, *1400–1800*, edited by José Rabasa, Masayuki Sato, Edoardo Tortarolo, and Daniel Woolf (Oxford, 2012), 119–47.

while also allowing for in-depth analysis of historical practices within their social contexts.[48] We have seen above how, when viewed from the perspective of the modern historical profession, premodern texts from Java seem to skirt the boundary between historical and nonhistorical works. This gives us an opportunity to interrogate our own assumptions about what constitutes history, not just as an outgrowth of nineteenth-century European academia but as a set of diverse global phenomena. Each chapter of the book examines how a specific aspect of historical practice is shaped by its relationships to texts. The production and use of historical evidence is investigated in chapters 1 and 2, the writing of historical texts in chapters 3 and 4, and the transmission of historical knowledge in chapter 5. The conclusion draws out the book's implications for our understanding of historical practice throughout the world, and how they promise to enrich our own approaches to history.

Chapter 1 argues that the survival of texts is a key factor that shapes historical practices. Written, spoken, and remembered texts can serve as historical evidence, but only if they survive for long enough. Texts' survival depends on several contingent factors, such as the material basis of writing, the availability of technologies for their reproduction, and the mixing of communicative modes. These factors vary greatly from one context to another, leading to different kinds of access to textual evidence of the past. Premodern Java offers an illuminating example of this dynamic. Texts written on organic materials, such as palm leaf and bark paper, perished much more quickly in Java's tropical climate than in drier and more temperate parts of the world. People in Java preferred handwriting to mechanized printing, and they freely wove speech and memory into the transmission of their written texts. Through comparisons between Java and other parts of the world, the chapter clarifies how the survival of texts plays a crucial role in the evolution of historical practices.

Chapter 2 considers how practices of recordkeeping are shaped by social organizations that need to preserve, access, and control historical information. The production and maintenance of written records, which are essential to the functioning of many kinds of organization, create a base of evidence

48. This approach differs from that of several significant publications that offer synthetic overviews of the historical practices of many world regions. Georg G. Iggers, Q. Edward Wang, and Supriya Mukherjee, *A Global History of Modern Historiography* (Routledge, 2008); Daniel Woolf, ed., *The Oxford History of Historical Writing* (Oxford University Press, 2011–15).

for historical study. The case of premodern Java reveals how social organizations and historical practices are linked. The emergence of official records on the island was correlated with the rise of robust organizations in the eighth century, such as temple foundations, village councils, and taxation systems. Records were produced in standardized formats tailored to their needs, thereby defining the scope of historical evidence available for future research. The severe disruption experienced by these organizations in the sixteenth century brought about a collapse in the production of such records and caused archives to become dispersed and inaccessible. The vicissitudes of recordkeeping in Java thus show how historical practices are enabled and constrained by the recording activities of social organizations.

The next two chapters focus on how literary genres shape historical practice. They show that genres are not neutral containers for historical writing but actively shape and influence how history is practiced. Chapter 3 examines the annals genre, whose chronological format allows for the intermixing of a wide variety of historical information. Annals contain lists of dated entries and are often tied to the timekeeping practices of the state. This chronological structure allows annalists to merge diverse sources into new compilations. Surviving annals texts from Java, dating from the tenth century CE onward, offer insights into the strengths and limitations of the genre. Annals are able to provide textual cohesion to a fragmentary historical record, thereby preserving that knowledge for the future. However, disagreements among the original sources can produce internal contradictions in the newly compiled text. Annals are often the only sources available to us for certain important events in Java's history, but the peculiarities of their format and inconsistencies in their structure can make it difficult to properly interpret them. In this respect, annals in premodern Java reflect a complex historical practice whose advantages and challenges find resonance throughout the world.

Chapter 4 studies another significant genre of history: the heroic biography. Works of this genre focus on historical events of a certain kind and explain them in specific ways. They construe history as being shaped by exceptional individuals, a perspective sometimes called the Great Man view of history. Heroic biographies appropriate the conventions of literary fiction, including epic and romance, to narrate the past in a poetic and dramatic fashion. In premodern Java, such works have a narrow focus on political conflict in royal contexts, and they deploy an explanatory model in which historical events are driven by the moral failings of leaders toward predestined outcomes. These features have caused some modern historians of Java

to dismiss the heroic biographies as unhistorical fantasy. However, a more nuanced perspective sees them as genuine expressions of historical knowledge within the structures of literary convention. Heroic biographies compel us to acknowledge the diversity of literary forms that history can take in cultures other than our own. They can therefore undermine the theoretical dichotomy between history and literature itself.

Chapter 5 examines how knowledge is passed down over time in the form of historical traditions. The transmission of knowledge is profoundly influenced by processes of textual reproduction. This is especially true when the perishability of written texts makes it difficult to consult original source documents. Historical traditions are transmitted through multiple textual modes, such as writing, speech, and memory, in any combination. Each kind of multimodal transmission varies in its own characteristic way. This can lead to inconsistencies in people's knowledge of the past, when contradictory versions of events emerge as a natural result of textual transmission itself. Premodern Java furnishes an excellent example of this phenomenon, in a historical tradition concerning the kingdom of Majapahit. Through a forensic examination of conflicting versions of this tradition, which include inscriptions, annals, heroic biographies, and theatrical performances, the chapter shows how major variations were produced by interwoven oral, mnemonic, and written transmission over the centuries. The dynamics of historical tradition in Java can illuminate similar processes of variation in historical traditions elsewhere in the premodern world.

The book concludes by considering the theoretical and methodological consequences of its study of the relationships between history and texts. The great variety of texts in premodern Java, whether written, spoken, or remembered, ranging from fragile palm-leaf manuscripts to solid stone inscriptions, from recitations of epic tales to shadow puppet theater, were all crucial in shaping how people did history on this vast island. Today's growing demand for comparative, global, and non-Eurocentric accounts of historiography requires a detailed investigation of how history is practiced in each specific context. The book's main claim—that historical practices are shaped by their relationships to texts—is relevant in many other places in the world besides Java. The concluding chapter works through the implications of this, for our understanding of history itself and for our own historical practices today. It thus reveals new opportunities for practicing history in a more truly global way.

ONE

The Survival of Texts

TEXTS PLAY A CRUCIAL ROLE in communicating knowledge of the past. This chapter examines why historical texts are lost and how they can survive by being transmitted through interwoven modes of communication, not only writing but also speech, memory, and performance. Historians everywhere are troubled by the gulf between what is lost and what survives. Written documents are an important source of evidence about the past, but a great deal of what was once written down no longer exists, and many written artifacts are no longer legible. Oral traditions and collective memories can sustain historical knowledge over hundreds of years, but they can also distort information over time. The case of premodern Java illustrates these dilemmas well. Historical information was recorded in the island's manuscripts, but due to its inhospitable tropical climate, they were at constant risk of damage and destruction. The loss of texts made the past precarious for people in Java, and their tactics for saving those texts shaped the way they practiced history.

A text can be defined as a verbal pattern that varies little across multiple realizations. Typical examples of texts include a speech that is delivered with the same wording to different audiences, a pamphlet that is typeset and printed by the thousands, or an academic article that is downloaded on devices across the world. Variation defines the boundaries of a text. It can occur at many scales: spelling differences of individual words, syntactic reorganization within sentences, reordering of paragraphs, or even restructuring of the whole text. The modes of a text can also vary across its different realizations. For example, a play can be realized in printed copies of the script given to the actors at a table read, in their spoken delivery during each performance on stage, and in the televised broadcast of its opening night. Such a situation is best understood as the realization of a single text—the play—in multiple modes.

How much variation can a text bear before it can no longer be considered a single entity? This is an open question in textual scholarship. For example, major variations among manuscripts of the Old English *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle(s)*, such as the omission or addition of long passages of historical narrative, continue to provoke debate about whether this text should be designated in the singular or in the plural.[1] Texts like the epic tale *Rāmāyaṇa* are often called "textual traditions" because they exhibit wide variability of detail while still reflecting a consistent overall pattern across many regions and over many centuries.[2] The distinction between an individual text and the broader tradition to which it belongs depends on our criteria for what counts as a textual unit. When we compare texts from societies other than our own, we need to explicitly acknowledge the limits of variability that are built into our assumptions of what defines a text.

This chapter explores three factors of textual survival that are directly relevant to historical practice in premodern Java. The first factor is the great difficulty of preserving written sources, due to the perishability of texts written on organic materials. The destruction of written documents was a problem in Java and many other premodern societies because it caused a drastic loss of evidence for studying the past. The second factor is a community's choices in reproducing written texts. While some societies adopted mechanized printing in the early modern period, people in Java were tenaciously committed to handwriting. Instead of printing presses, they relied on scriptoria for the reproduction of texts through manual copying, which greatly limited the propagation of their written documents. The third factor is that historical texts in premodern Java were realized through the interweaving of communicative modes like writing, speech, and memory. This multimodality had a profound effect on how such texts varied over time, leading to unique challenges in using them as historical sources. These three factors shaped the distinctive conditions under which texts have been created, transmitted, and received in Java. Generalizing these considerations can help us to better grasp how the variable survival of texts around the world has brought about the global diversity of historical practice.

1. Pauline Stafford, *After Alfred: Anglo-Saxon Chronicles and Chroniclers, 900–1150* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 104–6.

2. Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger and Laurie J. Sears, eds., *Boundaries of the Text: Epic Performances in South and Southeast Asia*, Michigan Papers on South and Southeast Asia 35 (University of Michigan Press, 1991); Mandakranta Bose, ed., *The* Rāmāyaṇa *Revisited* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

PERISHABLE WRITING

Writing differs from other modes of communication in one important respect: the material traces of writing can last much longer than those of speech and memory. Written documents can endure over millennia and can therefore be read by people in the far future. If a document is durable, if its writing remains legible, and if its language can still be understood, it can persist as a source of historical information for centuries after it was first created.[3] But if a document perishes quickly without being copied, the information it contains is irretrievably lost. To understand how historical practices evolve within a particular milieu like that of premodern Java, we must appreciate and learn to work with this perishability.

This book deals primarily with two types of written artifact: manuscripts and inscriptions. Manuscripts and inscriptions are differentiated by the material from which they are produced: a manuscript is made of organic materials, while an inscription is made of inorganic materials.[4] Manuscripts are generally cheaper and more convenient to produce, but they tend to be much more perishable than inscriptions. The durability of inscriptions and manuscripts depends greatly on the materials they are made of and the climatic conditions they are kept in. The earliest surviving inscriptions come from Mesopotamia, inscribed in cuneiform script on clay tablets. The process of imprinting cuneiform characters on a wet clay tablet, which was then dried, produced durable artifacts that have survived for up to five millennia. Baking these tablets further hardened and strengthened the clay. Due to these material factors, Mesopotamian inscriptions have survived to the present day in very large quantities, nearly half a million by some estimates.[5] The

3. The undeciphered scripts of bronze-age Crete and Cyprus, including Linear A, Cretan hieroglyphs, and Cypro-Minoan, illustrate how even if the texts are physically enduring, the loss of linguistic knowledge can render their contents inaccessible. Silvia Ferrara, *Cypro-Minoan Inscriptions*, 2 vols. (Oxford University Press, 2012–13); Philippa M. Steele, ed., *Understanding Relations Between Scripts: The Aegean Writing Systems* (Oxbow Books, 2017).

4. This way of distinguishing between manuscripts and inscriptions has been problematized by some scholars. Silvio Panciera, "What Is an Inscription? Problems of Definition and Identity of an Historical Source," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 183 (2012): 1–10; Emmanuel Francis, "Indian Copper-Plate Grants: Inscriptions or Documents?," in *Manuscripts and Archives: Comparative Views on Record-Keeping*, edited by Alessandro Bausi, Christian Brockmann, Michael Friedrich, and Sabine Kienitz (De Gruyter, 2018), 387–418.

5. Christopher Woods, "The Earliest Mesopotamian Writing," in *Visible Language: Inventions of Writing in the Ancient Middle East and Beyond*, edited by Christopher Woods,

copiousness and longevity of these inscriptions is one of the primary reasons why the written history of Mesopotamia can be traced back further than almost anywhere else in the world.

Manuscripts, being made of organic materials, are intrinsically less durable than inscriptions. They require certain environmental conditions for their long-term preservation. Such conditions are found in Egypt, where the dry climate and the practice of entombing texts has helped to preserve many papyrus manuscripts that would otherwise have perished.[6] The preservation of texts is not always intentional. Papyrus texts in Egypt were used for everyday transactions, but many ended up surviving for thousands of years without any deliberate attempt to preserve them. Clay tablets in Mesopotamia could have their longevity extended by being accidentally baked as the buildings containing them burned down, as is believed to have happened in the royal library of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (seventh century BCE), the place where the renowned *Epic of Gilgamesh* has been preserved.[7] Contingency plays a crucial role in the uneven and unpredictable patterns of textual loss and survival throughout the world.[8]

People in Java wrote on a diverse range of materials, including organic materials like palm leaf, wooden boards, and mulberry-bark paper, as well as inorganic materials like stone, copper, silver, and gold.[9] The earliest kind of organic material used for writing in Java seems to have been the leaves of palm trees, of which there is evidence from over a thousand years ago. Old Javanese inscriptions use the word "leaf" (*ripta*) to refer to the organic material used for writing administrative documents, including but not necessarily limited to palm leaf, as well as the more specific term *tāla* (palmyra palm

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with Emily Teeter and Geoff Emberling (University of Chicago, 2010); "Clay Tablet," in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Archaeology* (Springer, 2021).

6. Fredrik Hagen, with a contribution by Daniel Soliman, "Archives in Ancient Egypt, 2500–1000 BCE," in *Manuscripts and Archives: Comparative Views on Record-Keeping*, edited by Alessandro Bausi, Christian Brockmann, Michael Friedrich, and Sabine Kienitz (De Gruyter, 2018), 71–170.

7. Lucien X. Polastron, *Books on Fire: The Tumultuous Story of the World's Great Libraries* (Thames & Hudson, 2007), 3.

8. Mark Whittow, "Sources of Knowledge; Cultures of Recording," *Past and Present* 238, Supplement 13 (2018): 72.

9. Hinzler, "The Book in Ancient Java," 157–89; Aditia Gunawan, "*Nipah* or *Gebang*? A Philological and Codicological Study Based on Sources from West Java," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 171 (2015): 249–80; Jiří Jákl, "The Folding Book Format (Concertina) in Pre-Islamic Java: Revisiting the Old Javanese Term *Ləpihan*," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* 102 (2016): 165–93.

leaf).[10] Both terms *ripta* and *tāla* derive from Indo-Aryan languages.[11] This suggests a direct link to the manuscript practices of India, where palm leaf has been the most common type of writing material in traditional manuscript production.[12] The modern Javanese word *lontar* (palmyra palm) is formed from metathesis of the phrase *ron tal* (palm leaf), where the word *tal* is a localized version of *tāla*.

Foreign sources corroborate the use of palm leaf for writing in Java. The Chinese dynastic history *Old Book of Tang* (mid-tenth century CE) states that the locals "also have written words, which they write on palm leaves."[13] The Chinese term used here for palm leaves is *bèiduō*, probably a borrowing from the Sanskrit word *pattra* (leaf). The use of palm leaves is confirmed in a description of Java in Mǎ Huān's *The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores* (1413 CE): "They have no paper or pen; they use palm leaves, on which they scratch the letters with a sharp knife."[14] In this later text, the term for palm

10. The Banjaran inscription (1053 CE) mentions a charter "that is to be set on palmyra palm leaves" (*saṅ muṅgva riṅ tāla*) (2a.1) (Old Javanese). Quoted from the edition by Eko Bastiawan and Arlo Griffiths (available on the DHARMA database; see "Conventions Used in the Book" in this volume). The inscription was previously published in Boechari, *Melacak Sejarah Indonesia Lewat Prasasti*, 514. See the definition of the word *tāla* in Sanskrit texts in M. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary: Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European Languages* (Clarendon Press, 1899), s.v. "tāla."

11. The Old Javanese *ripta* (leaf) is probably a back-formation of the Middle Indo-Aryan word *ritta* (empty), equivalent to Sanskrit *rikta*, along the model of Old Javanese *cipta* from Sanskrit *citta* (thought), as proposed by Tom Hoogervorst. The meaning of "leaf" was likely obtained through an abbreviation of the hypothetical Old Javanese compound *ripta-pattra* (empty leaf) since a parallel phenomenon is found in Old Khmer *rikta-pattra* > *rikta*, which means "blank leaf or plate prepared for writing." Tom Hoogervorst, "The Role of 'Prakrit' in Maritime Southeast Asia Through 101 Etymologies," in *Spirits and Ships: Cultural Transfers in Early Monsoon Asia*, edited by Andrea Acri, Roger Blench, and Alexandra Landmann (ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, 2017), 384; Philip Jenner, *Dictionary of Angkorian Khmer* (Pacific Linguistics, 2009), s.v. "rikta."

12. Jeremiah P. Losty, *The Art of the Book in India* (British Library, 1982).

13. "亦有文字書之於貝多葉 [Yì yǒu wénzì shū zhī yú bèiduō yè]" (Classical Chinese), *Old Book of Tang* 197.5273 [*Jiù Táng shū* 舊唐書] (Zhonghua shuju, 1975). The text is furnished by the Chinese Text Project, https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=en&file=75815&page=85. The English translation is based on W. P. Groeneveldt's translation. This description is of a place called Duòpódēng 墮婆登, which was probably located somewhere in the western half of Java. Donald Sturgeon, ed., "Chinese Text Project"; W. P. Groeneveldt, *Historical Notes on Indonesia and Malaya Compiled from Chinese Sources* (Bhatara, 1960), 58; Jordaan and Colless, *Mahārājas of the Isles*, 258–59.

14. "無紙筆用茭葦葉以刀刻之 [Wú zhǐbǐ yòng jiāozhāng yè yǐ jiāndāo kè zhī]" (Classical Chinese). The Chinese text of *The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores* (Yíngyá shèng

leaf is *jiāozhāng*, probably a borrowing from the Malay word *kajang* (palm, pandanus).[15]

There is artifactual evidence of palm-leaf manuscripts in premodern Java. Several ninth- and early tenth-century inscriptions are written on very thin copper strips, whose dimensions and format closely imitate those of a palm-leaf manuscript.[16] Visual depictions of books on stone temple reliefs also suggest that palm leaf was the writing material of choice. Reliefs on the ninth-century temple complexes of Borobudur and Prambanan in central Java depict two book formats: a bound book wrapped by a cord in a crosswise pattern and a loose-leaf format of one or a few leaves without binding holes.[17] Reliefs on some thirteenth- and fourteenth-century temples in eastern Java depict rigid objects of palm-leaf dimensions but without binding cords, which probably also represent palm-leaf manuscripts.[18]

Palm leaf had been used as a writing material in Java for many centuries before paper assumed that role. The prominence of paper seems to have only begun in the early modern period, concurrent with the rise of Islamic kingdoms on the island in the sixteenth century.[19] This is consistent with the well-attested role of Islamicate culture in introducing paper to western Europe and northern India.[20] No paper is mentioned in the extensive

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lǎn 瀛涯勝覽) is obtained from scans of a printed edition of Mǎ Huān's work, furnished by the Chinese Text Project, https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=en&file=207393&page=21. The English translation is by J. V. G. Mills. Ma Huan, *Ying-yai sheng-lan 'The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores' [1433]*, edited by Feng Chengjun, translated by J. V. G. Mills (Published for the Hakluyt Society at the University Press, 1970), 97; Donald Sturgeon, ed., "Chinese Text Project."

15. Claudine Salmon, "Malay (and Javanese) Loan-Words in Chinese as a Mirror of Cultural Exchanges," *Archipel* 78 (2009): 193–94.

16. These inscriptions include several held by the National Museum of Indonesia, such as Kwak I (878 CE) and Kubu-Kubu (905 CE).

17. H. I. R. Hinzler, "The Book in Ancient Java: Books, Writing, Writing Material, and Reading in Written and Visual Evidence," in *Fruits of Inspiration: Studies in Honour of Prof. J. G. de Casparis*, edited by Marijke J. Klokke and Karel R. van Kooij (Forsten, 2001).

18. Lydia Kieven, *Following the Cap-Figure in Majapahit Temple Reliefs: A New Look at the Religious Function of East Javanese Temples, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Brill, 2013), 199; Marijke J. Klokke, "The Kṛṣṇa Reliefs at Panataran: A Visual Version of the Old Javanese *Kṛṣṇāyana*," in *Narrative Sculpture and Literary Traditions in South and Southeast Asia*, edited by Marijke J. Klokke (Brill, 2000), 19–41.

19. Pigeaud, *Literature of Java*, 1:35–36.

20. Jonathan M. Bloom, "Papermaking: The Historical Diffusion of an Ancient Technique," in *Mobilities of Knowledge*, edited by Heike Jöns, Peter Meusburger, and Michael Heffernan (Klaus Tschira Stiftung, 2017), 54.

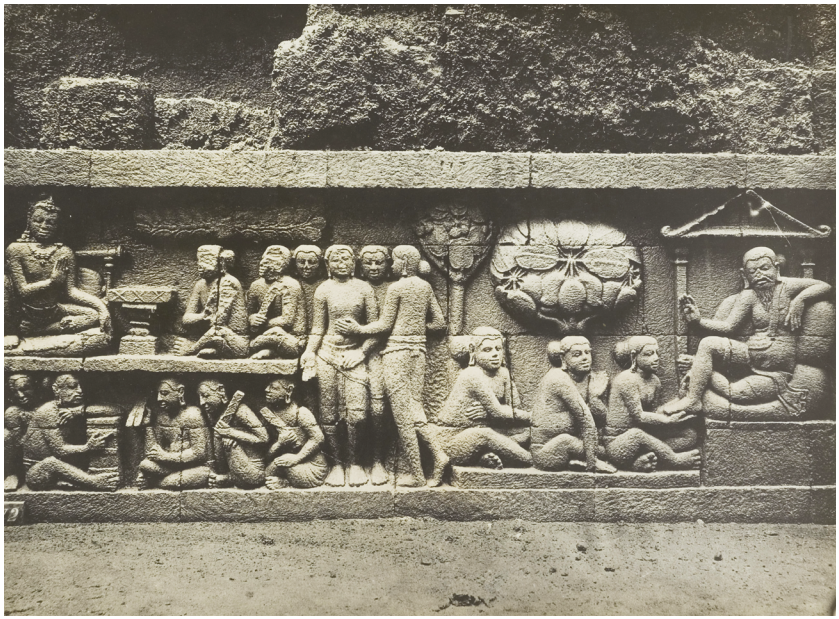

FIGURE 3. Carved depictions of palm-leaf manuscripts and oral teaching, panel 0.79 on the Mahākarmavibhaṅga covered base, Borobudur temple, central Java (built circa 800 CE). Photograph by Kassian Cephas (1890/1891). Public domain.

list of writing media given in the sixteenth-century encyclopedia *Śāsana Mahāguru*, which was produced in a non-Islamic community in western Java.[21] The earliest physical evidence for writing paper in Java are bark-paper manuscripts containing guides to Islamic practice and belief; they were brought to Europe upon the return of the earliest Dutch voyages to the East Indies around the turn of the seventeenth century.[22] These Dutch visitors

21. See the edition and English translation of the *Śāsana Mahāguru* by Aditia Gunawan (DHARMA), and also the published edition and Indonesian translation: Aditia Gunawan, *Sanghyang Sasana Maha Guru dan Kala Purbaka: Suntingan dan Terjemahan* (Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2009).

22. These include the bark-paper manuscripts held in the Leiden University Library (shelf mark Or. 1928), in the Cambridge University Library (Gg.5.22.), and in the public library of Fulda in Germany (Ba 7). This third manuscript was first identified as Javanese in January 2025 by Adrian Vickers and Wayan Jarrah Sastrawan. G. W. J. Drewes, *The Admonitions of Seh Bari: A 16th Century Javanese Muslim Text Attributed to the Saint of Bonang*, Bibliotheca Indonesica 4 (KITLV Press, 1969), 1–2; Yayasan Sastra Lestari, Majid Daneshgar, and Edwin P. Wieringa, "An Early Javanese Manuscript on Islamic Law (*fiqh*): MS Gg.5.22 at Cambridge University Library," www.sastra.org/agama-dan-kepercayaan/wulang/3265-pranatan-islam-cambridge-university-library-gg-5-22-sebelum-1609-922-pendahuluan-inggris.

observed that Muslim Javanese living in the port city of Banten primarily used palm leaves as a writing material but that they also wrote "on Chinese paper of all colors, which is very fine and pure, and also on a kind of paper made from trees."[23] The transition of medium is mentioned in the preamble to the Javanese heroic romance *Carita Sultan Iskandar*, written on paper in 1729 CE, which states that it was copied from an early seventeenth-century original "written on palm leaves."[24]

Preserving manuscripts made of organic material like palm leaf is a challenge in the hot humid environment of Java. The region's tropical climate, especially its fluctuations of temperature and humidity, cause manuscripts to degrade rapidly.[25] Due to this risk, people in premodern Java chose to inscribe certain texts on stone and metal, motivated by the need to make them permanently available to be read in the future. For example, the Sarvadharma inscription on metal plates (1269 CE) mentions a previous version of the text on leaves: "The reason for the existence of the holy royal charter, which had Kṛ̥tanagara's emblem, was to confirm the independence of Sarvadharma, already set on leaves."[26] The Hantang stone inscription (1135 CE) states that it had been copied from an organic medium onto stone: "They begged [the king] to give approval for the grant of the one who died at Gajapāda and the one who died at Nāgapuṣpa, which was on leaves and served as protection

23. "Op Chinees pampier van alle couleur, dwelck seer fyn ende suyver is, oock op een sorte van pampier dat zy van boomen maken" (Early Modern Dutch). Willem Lodewycksz, *De eerste schipvaart der Nederlanders onder Cornelis de Houtman 1595–1597: I. D'Eerste boek van Willem Lodewycksz.*, edited by G. P. Rouffaer and J. W. IJzerman (Martinus Nijhoff, 1915), 120.

24. "Rereṅ tumrap iṅ karupak" (1.27) (Modern Javanese). M. C. Ricklefs, *The Seen and Unseen Worlds in Java, 1726–1749: History, Literature and Islam in the Court of Pakubuwana II* (University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 47.

25. René Teygeler, *Preservation of Archives in Tropical Climates: An Annotated Bibliography* (International Council on Archives, 2001), 59–67; John F. Dean, "Preservation in Tropical Climates: An Overview," *International Preservation News: A Newsletter of the IFLA Core Activity on Preservation and Conservation* 54 (2011): 6–10.

26. "Mataṅ yan dadi ta saṅ hyaṅ rājapraśāsti, malavā-lavā Kṛ̥tanagara, magəhakən kasvatantran saṅhyaṅ sarvadharma, sampun umuṅgv iṅ ripta" (6v.5–6) (Old Javanese). The text has been recently edited by Arlo Griffiths (DHARMA). An earlier edition was published in J. L. A. Brandes, *Oud-Javaansche Oorkonden: Nagelaten Transscripties*, edited by N. J. Krom, Verhandelingen van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen 60 (Albrecht & Co., 1913), 188–93.

for the villagers of Hantang, including the twelve villages in its domain, to be made permanent on a standing stone."[27]

Copying a text from leaves to stone or metal was believed to make it permanent. About a dozen Old Javanese inscriptions employ the set phrase "placed on one or other of stone, copper, or leaves" or else allude to having previously been written on leaves.[28] The perishability of organic writing materials was also a concern on the neighboring island of Bali. Several eleventh-century royal grants explicitly state that they had been copied from leaves onto metal to protect their contents from being lost or becoming illegible. Recipients of these grants "requested that the grant be manifested in an imperishable form, and desired to set the contents of the charter onto copper, the grant of a former king, which was precarious because the leaves were rotten and it could not be read."[29]

The perishability of organic writing materials was also remarked upon in modern times. The philologist Rudolph Friederich described the condition of a nineteenth-century Balinese manuscript of the Old Javanese poem *Bhāratayuddha* (originally composed in 1157 CE) as follows:

> From its outward appearance, I would have taken the manuscript to be much older. In 46 years, the palm leaves have already become so damaged, and so it is certain, as is also said of Indian manuscripts, that they cannot last longer than 100 years. This would also be one of the reasons that in Java, in such a short time, almost the whole of the ancient literature was lost, because

27. "Maṅhyaṅ ri yogyani paṅanugraha saṅlumah ri Gajapāda mvaṅ anugraha saṅlumah ri Nāgapuṣpa hana riṅ ripta pinakātmarakṣanikaṅ varga ri dalәm thāni ri Hantaṅ tәka ri viṣayanya rvavlas thāni pratiṣṭākәna riṅ liṅgopala" (a.9–10) (Old Javanese). Brandes, *Oud-Javaansche Oorkonden*, 154–58.

28. "Muṅgu ri salah sikiniṅ upala-tamra-ripta" (Old Javanese). It is found in the following inscriptions: Maribong (1v.6), Sarvadharma (6v.6), Air Asih (a.2), Parablyan (a.2), Kudadu (3r), Sukhāmṛta (10v.4), Warunggahan (4v.4), Canggu (4v.6), Trailokyapuri IV (a.6).

29. "Amintānugraha titisanāmṛtāhyun tumambrakәna rasani praśastinya, anugrahanirātīta prabhu, tan subaddha avuk riptani pukulun tan vәnaṅ vinaca" (4r3) (Old Javanese). Besides this quotation from the undated Babahan II inscription, other documents from Bali that include similar wording are Pura Endek A III (1003 CE), Trunyan A II (1050 CE), Sukawana A II (1054 CE), Dausa Pura Bukit Indrakila A II (1061 CE), Sembiran A IV (1065 CE), Pengotan A II (1069 CE), Manik Liu B II (no date), Sawan A II (1073 CE), Munduktemu III (1078 CE), Gobleg Pura Desa III (1115 CE), and Kintamani E (1200 CE). These texts are the subject of ongoing research by Hedwi Prihatmoko, who generously shared his provisional readings.

of which, when the desire for the old literature was aroused, almost no old manuscripts could still be found.[30]

Friederich's point applies to Indonesian manuscripts across the board. The short lifespan of manuscripts resulted in severe disruption to the written tradition in Java. In a similar vein, an early twentieth-century manuscript from Bali describes in self-referential terms how it was reconstituted from a damaged and fragmentary original: "This palm-leaf manuscript was found in a destroyed and rotten state. It was put back together again, and whatever was legible was recopied."[31] These modern examples confirm the observations made in the premodern inscriptions: manuscripts on organic materials were highly perishable, and their contents could easily be lost through physical deterioration.

The preservation of manuscripts in Indonesia is very challenging. It is possible in rare instances for manuscripts to survive for several centuries, but such long-term preservation of manuscripts requires effective techniques of care. There tends to be an inverse relationship between how often a manuscript is used and how long it can last.[32] Recent research has revealed a handful of such long-lived Indonesian manuscripts on paper and palm leaf. A bark-paper manuscript from Kerinci in central Sumatra has been physically dated to the fifteenth century at the latest.[33] Two charters painted on wooden boards, kept in the Balinese temple complex of Besakih, bear written

30. "Naar het uiterlijk voorkomen zou ik het mscr. voor veel ouder gehouden hebben; in 46 jaren zijn de lontarbladeren al zeer verminkt, en het is dus wel zeker, wat ook van Indische manuscripten gezegd wordt, dat zij niet ouder dan 100 jaren kunnen worden. Dit zal ook eene van de redenen zijn, dat op Java in zoo korten tijd bijna de geheele oude litteratuur verloren geraakt is, dewijl men, toen de lust tot de oude litteratur opgewekt was, nagenoeg geene oude manuscripten meer vinden kon" (Dutch). For an alternative translation, see A. H. May's English translation. R. Friederich, *Voorloopig verslag van het eiland Balie*, Verhandelingen van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen 22 (1849), 17; "Account of the Island of Bali," translated by A. H. May, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, n.s., 8 (1877), 180.

31. "Lontar iki, wolih rusak tepu, malih katutupang, asing keni tinurun" (77v) (Modern Balinese). Anak Agung Gede Putra Agung, *Transliterasi dan Terjemahan Historiografi Tradisional di Bali: Babad Dalem dan Babad Karangasem-Sasak* (Tokyo Foundation, 1988), 227.

32. Dick van der Meij, *Indonesian Manuscripts from the Islands of Java, Madura, Bali and Lombok*, Handbuch der Orientalistik 24 (Brill, 2017), 41–45.

33. Uli Kozok, with contributions from Thomas Hunter, Waruno Mahdi, and John Miksic, *A 14th Century Malay Code of Laws: The Nītisārasamuccaya* (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2015), 300.

FIGURE 4. Palm-leaf manuscript closed between wooden covers from Sunda, western Java (copied 1493 CE or later), containing the Old Javanese religious text *Sang Hyang Hayu*. British Library MSS Jav 53 t. Public domain.

dates of 1444 and 1458 CE.[34] Several palm-leaf manuscripts originating from highland communities in western Java are believed to have been produced between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, based on information in their colophons and on their paleographic style.[35]

All of the very old manuscripts listed above were venerated as heirloom objects. They were kept out of public reach, taken out only on special occasions to be cared for, and very rarely read. They were often kept in protective packaging, such as wrapping cloth and closed boxes, to mitigate fluctuations of temperature and humidity.[36] Most of these long-lived manuscripts were kept in mountain communities, whose high altitude and cooler average temperatures further improved the environmental conditions for their preservation. Care of manuscripts could be enhanced by treating them with oils to prevent them becoming brittle and fumigating them to repel harmful insects.[37]

34. R. Goris, "De Poera Bĕsakih: Bali's Rijkstempel," *Djåwå: Tijdschrift van het Java-Instituut* 17 (1937), 265.

35. Aditia Gunawan, "*Nipah* or *Gebang*?," 269.

36. Om Prakash Agrawal, *Conservation of Manuscripts and Paintings of South-East Asia* (Butterworths, 1984), 40–55.

37. Tim Behrend, "Textual Gateways: the Javanese Manuscript Tradition," in *Illuminations: The Writing Traditions of Indonesia*, edited by Ann Kumar and John H. McGlynn (Weatherill, 1996), 165.

These conditions were the exception, not the norm. The extreme scarcity of very old manuscripts from premodern Java in present-day collections shows that manuscripts generally degraded within a couple of centuries. The loss of manuscripts, particularly those containing administrative information and historical narratives, resulted in the severe fragmentation of the evidence base for the study of Java's past. The dearth of original manuscripts from premodern Java makes it one of the "cold patches" in global medieval history, which lacks the "density and intensity of evidence" found in east Asia or western Europe in the same period.[38] The destruction of written evidence had major implications for historical practices in premodern Java, as it does for modern researchers of Java's history.

TENACIOUS HANDWRITING

Written texts can survive through physical endurance, but they can also survive by being reproduced. The extent of reproduction depends on the technologies available to make multiple copies of the same text. Textual reproduction can be achieved through handwriting but also through stamping, casting, printing, and broadcasting, among other processes. The use of these technologies differs greatly from one context to another. Since the survival of texts determines the availability of historical evidence, the prevailing methods of textual reproduction have a direct impact on how history is practiced.

Printing is a very important technology of textual reproduction. Advanced printing technologies, such as moveable type, the printing press, and lithography, can massively expand people's capacity to produce near-identical copies of a single text. In the words of historian Elizabeth Eisenstein, the adoption of print can be an "agent of change," because it allows for documents to be produced on a much larger scale, which results in a vast expansion of the written source base.[39] However, print is not a universal or necessary feature of modernity. Moveable type was used widely and intensively in China and other parts of eastern Asia in the eleventh century, well

38. Whittow, "Sources of Knowledge; Cultures of Recording," 48.

39. Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 1979); Sabrina Alcorn Baron, Eric N. Lindquist, and Eleanor F. Shevlin, *Agent of Change: Print Culture Studies after Elizabeth L. Eisenstein* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2007).

before the onset of the early modern period there.[40] To view the printing press as going hand in hand with modernity risks imposing a teleological viewpoint, which fails to account for the contingent and open-ended histories of printing throughout the world.

Certain societies did not choose to adopt advanced printing technologies until well after they had begun to industrialize. The Ottoman Empire is often cited as an example of a society that adopted mechanized printing late, at least in comparison to western Europe.[41] Printing technology was not foreign to the Ottomans. The library of the fifteenth-century Ottoman emperor Mehmed II contained printed material, while Italian printers began to produce Arabic-type books in the sixteenth century. There were thriving Jewish, Orthodox, and Catholic presses in Constantinople from the sixteenth century, as well as a handful of Arabic-type printers from the early eighteenth century.[42] However, the extensive Ottoman bureaucracy retained its systematic scribal practices through to the nineteenth century, and printing remained almost entirely in private non-Muslim hands throughout the early modern period. No single factor was decisive in this outcome. Small book markets, cultural bias against printing, an already powerful scribal industry, and limited avenues for propaganda may all have contributed to the reticence of the Ottoman Muslims to adopt advanced printing technologies.[43] When comparing the trajectories of print culture in different societies, we must not assume that any deviation from the western European experience is a failure to stay up to date with technological trends.

Java was another place where people did not choose to adopt mechanized printing in the same way that Europeans did. This was a conscious choice, not a predetermined outcome of the island's cultural development. There is nothing about Javanese texts that should make them intrinsically difficult to print. The various local scripts of Java pose no technical problem for the implementation of moveable type, as they all consist of a small number of

40. Lucille Chia, "Printing and Publishing in East Asia Through Circa 1600: An Extremely Brief Survey," *Mediaevalis* 41 (2020): 129–162.

41. Orlin Sabev, *Waiting for Müteferrika: Glimpses of Ottoman Print Culture* (Academic Studies Press, 2018), 111–12.

42. Yaron Ben-Naeh, "Hebrew Printing Houses in the Ottoman Empire," in *Jewish Journalism and Printing Houses in the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, edited by Gad Nassi (Isis Press, 2001), 35–82; Nil Pektaş, "The Beginnings of Printing in the Ottoman Capital: Book Production and Circulation in Early Modern Istanbul," *Osmanlı Bilimi Araçstırmaları* 16 (2015): 3–32.

43. Kathryn A. Schwartz, "Did The Ottomans Ban Print?," *Book History* 20 (2017): 2.

glyphs with regular rules for their combination. A late sixteenth–century European visitor to western Java wrote that "they have no press, but are beautiful in handwriting and write neatly."[44] The first printing presses in Java were established in Batavia in the seventeenth century, but they served Dutch commercial and religious interests and did not print Javanese texts.[45] It was only with the increasing territorial dominance of the Netherlands Indies in nineteenth-century Java that handwriting slowly gave way to printing.

There was an enduring cultural attachment to handwriting in Java. Until as late as the nineteenth century, handwriting was the predominant means of producing written texts in the local languages of Java and its neighbors. This attachment is reflected in the choice not to use printing technologies to produce written texts, as well as the ongoing importance of scriptoria and manuscript libraries. Even though handwritten texts on organic materials are so time-consuming to produce and so difficult to preserve, they were the most common type of writing encountered by people in Java until recent times. Making manuscripts was the subject of serious, even mystical reflection. A description of the process of manuscript production is found in several texts of spiritual instruction written in various places in Java and Bali. A passage from the fifteenth-century *Bhīma Svarga* from the Sunda region of western Java, where leaves of the *gebang* palm (*Corypha utan*) rather than the *lontar* palmyra palm (*Borassus flabellifer*) were the predominant writing medium, explains: "The origin of blackened books: the *gebang* palm leaves are trimmed to be uniform in width and length. The *gaṅgā vīra tanu* are applied to them. *Gaṅgā* is the water, *vīra* the pen, *tanu* the ink."[46] The Old Javanese term used for "being applied to something" (*tinitisan*) also has the metaphorical meaning of "being incarnated within something." The application of writing instruments was thus believed to animate the palm

44. "Zy en hebben gheenen druck: maer zijn fraey ter pennen, ende schryven ordentelijck" (Early Modern Dutch). Lodewycksz, *D'Eerste Boeck*, 120.

45. H. J. de Graaf, *Indonesia*, The Spread of Printing: Eastern Hemisphere 6 (Vangendt, 1969), 12–28.

46. "Mūlaniṅ pustaka hirəṅ, ron iṅ gəbaṅ, pinukah pinaḍa-paḍa lvane lavan davane, tinitisan gaṅgā vīra tanu, gaṅgā riṅ bañu, vīra riṅ panuli, tanu riṅ mañsi" (84.2–4) (Old Javanese). The text is quoted from the critical edition and Indonesian translation by Aditia Gunawan, while the English translation is original. Aditia Gunawan, *Bhīma Svarga: Teks Jawa Kuna Abad ke-15 dan Penurunan Naskahnya*, Seri Penerbitan Tesis dan Disertasi 4 (Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2019), 63. See also Aditia Gunawan, "Manuscript Production and *Akṣara* Mysticism in the *Bhīma Svarga*," Nalanda Sriwijaya Centre Working Paper (ISEAS, 2017), 9–10.

leaves, just as the soul animates the body.[47] The text goes on to identify components of the physical manuscript with various deities and mythic figures:

> Yudhiṣṭhira is the *gebang* palm leaves, Arjuna is the cord, Nakula and Sahadeva are the covers, the writing on the book is the god Dharmarāja, the one who is charged with the book is the holy Lord Citragotra.[48]

> My book is Sadāśiva, my covers are Brahmā and Śiva, my *gebang* palm leaves are the lord Vāyu, my book's cord is the holy Suntagi Manik, the book is my voice, the essence of the [magical book] *Kalimahoṣadha* is my body, the ink is my mind, the god Śambhu is the deity of my scripture.[49]

The text contains realistic details about how ink was produced: "The soot of an oil lamp is rubbed in a copper bowl, dissolved in lye from the *kepuh* tree, mixed with lac, ground and placed in an inkwell. That is called "ink." It is done in the place for making books."[50] Versions of these passages are widespread in later texts as well, such as in ascetic codes from western Java and in puppetry manuals from Bali.[51]

The act of handwriting was thus considered to be spiritually charged. It is somewhat surprising that print technology was never accorded a similar numinous character. The Javanese were quick to adopt other foreign innovations when they encountered them in the early modern period, such as pulp paper, firearms, mortar masonry, and tobacco smoking.[52] Conceptions of

47. This conception of writing remains prevalent in Bali today. Richard Fox, *More Than Words: Transforming Script, Agency, and Collective Life in Bali* (Cornell University Press, 2018), 64–65.

48. "Yudhiṣṭhira pinakagəbaṅ, Arjuna pinakatali, Nakula Sahadeva pinakapapan, tulis iṅ pustaka, saṅhyaṅ Dharmarāja, kaṅasədahan pustaka, saṅhyaṅ bhagavān Citragotra" (90.6–8) (Old Javanese). Dharmarāja is identified with Yama, the god of the dead, while Citragotra may be equivalent to Citragupta, the scribe of Yama. Aditia Gunawan, *Bhīma Svarga*, 66.

49. "Sadāśiva pustakaṅku, papanku Brahmā Śiva, gəbaṅku bhaṭāra Bayu, taliniṅ pustakaṅku, saṅ hyaṅ Suntagi Manik, pustaka śabdaku, lətik Kalimahoṣadha śarīra, hiḍəpku maṅsi, saṅ hyaṅ Śambhu devatane śāstraṅku" (92.9–93.2) (Old Javanese). Aditia Gunawan, *Bhīma Svarga*, 65–66.

50. "Kukus iṅ ləṅa dilah, ghināṣa riṅ lavak tambaga, jineran laṇḍaniṅ kəpuh, vinoran lāka, iṅulig iṅənah riṅ pamaṅsen, ya ta maṅsi arane, ikaṅ ta prasiddha ṅgvan iṅ agave pustaka" (66.6–8) (Old Javanese). Aditia Gunawan, "Manuscript Production," 13–15.

51. Aditia Gunawan, "Manuscript Production," 15; Mary Sabina Zurbuchen, *The Language of Balinese Shadow Theater* (Princeton University Press, 1987), ix, 268.

52. People in Java had already begun to import European pulp paper in the early seventeenth century, but for the next two centuries, they continued to handwrite rather than to

the sacred in Java have tended to be welcoming, not exclusionary of new technologies.[53] One would expect that advanced printing technologies could easily have been incorporated into existing practices of veneration. Besides immigrant communities like the Dutch, people in Java did not choose to develop a printing press for their own languages before the nineteenth century.

The tenacity of handwriting in Java resulted in the ongoing maintenance of scriptoria—places dedicated to copying texts by hand. Scriptoria existed in a wide variety of social contexts, such as in highland ascetic communities, in rural priestly households, and in urban royal palaces. Manuscripts were produced, loaned, and stored in scriptoria across Java, as well as on the neighboring islands of Madura, Bali, and Lombok. The scriptoria of particular regions were linked together by networks of manuscript copying and exchange.[54] They operated over many centuries, from the fifteenth-century mountain scriptoria mentioned in the travel narrative *Bujangga Manik* all the way to the end of nineteenth century, as demonstrated by the seizure in 1894 of the vast Cakranagara palace library on Lombok by the Dutch military.[55]

It is thanks to these scriptoria and libraries that texts written in premodern Java can still be read today. They produced recent copies of texts whose originals have long since perished, and they preserved the very few genuinely old manuscripts that have survived to the present day. Scriptoria were a major source for many colonial-era collections of manuscripts in Java and neighboring islands. These were obtained through a variety of means, including direct purchase from the scriptoria, private donation by third parties, and confiscation in war. Former colonial collections of Javanese manuscripts are now housed in public institutions like the National Library of Indonesia,

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print on it. Russell Jones, "European and Asian Papers in Malay Manuscripts: A Provisional Assessment," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 149 (1993): 481.

53. Claude Guillot and Ludvik Kalus, "Inscriptions islamiques sur des canons d'Insulinde du XVIe siècle," *Archipel* 72 (2006): 69–94.

54. Andrea Acri, "Tracing Transregional Networks and Connections Across the Indic Manuscript Cultures of Nusantara (AD 1400–1600)," in *Records, Recoveries, Remnants and Inter-Asian Interconnections: Decoding Cultural Heritage*, edited by Anjana Sharma (ISEAS-Yusok Ishak Institute, 2018), 184–221.

55. Kuntara Wiryamartana, I., "The Scriptoria in the Merbabu-Merapi Area," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 149 (1993): 503–9; Wayan Jarrah Sastrawan, "Oriental Philology After *Orientalism*," *Journal of the Society for Asian Humanities* 52 (2021): 120–25; Wayan Jarrah Sastrawan, "Violence in the Library: The Precolonial History of Looted Manuscripts from Lombok," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 181 (2025).

FIGURE 5. Illuminated Javanese manuscript on English paper (copied circa 1815). British Library Add MS 12300, ff. 2v.–3r. Public domain.

Leiden University Library, and the British Library.[56] In the nineteenth century, scriptoria continued to produce manuscripts under the auspices of colonial language officials and thereby had an ongoing influence on the inventory and organization of manuscript collections.[57] In the absence of printing, scriptoria have been vital to the transmission and preservation of texts in Java from premodern times to the present.

The tenacity of handwriting as the preferred option over printing was a major constraint on the availability of written evidence for the study of history. It meant that texts could not be reproduced quickly, because copying was limited by the pace of handwriting. It is difficult to precisely estimate the copying rates of Indonesian manuscripts, due to the different sizes of their writing surfaces and the fact that many scribes worked part-time.[58] Colophons from nineteenth-century manuscripts from western Lombok give a rough

56. For a comprehensive survey of Indonesian manuscript collections throughout the world, see Henri Chambert-Loir and Oman Fathurahman, *Khazanah Naskah: Panduan Koleksi Naskah-Naskah Indonesia Sedunia* (École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1999).

57. T. E. Behrend, "Manuscript Production in Nineteenth-Century Java: Codicology and the Writing of Javanese Literary History," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde* 149 (1993): 407–37.

58. H. I. R. Hinzler, "Balinese Palm-Leaf Manuscripts," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde* 149 (1993): 455.

estimate of how long it took to handwrite on palm leaves: between one and two double-sided leaves per day. An elderly scribe called Pangkajawati copied the epic poems *Bhomāntaka* and *Sumanasāntaka* at the rate of about three double-sided *lontar* leaves every four days.[59] Another scribe copied the Old Javanese *Virāṭaparva* at a rate of two leaves per day.[60] This severe limitation on the reproducibility of written documents meant that they could never be disseminated as broadly, and were therefore far less easily accessible, than if they had been mechanically printed.

INTERWOVEN TEXTUAL MODES

Human communication occurs in different modes, of which writing is only one among many.[61] These modes operate through various physical mechanisms, such as pressure waves in the air, the absorption of ink on a page, or the transmission of electronic signals through a cable. While the modes can be conceptually distinguished, in practice they are almost always interwoven with each other. For example, transcribing broadcast audio involves electronic signals being converted into sound waves, which are heard by a stenographer and converted into a handwritten transcript. Certain communicative modes can support the verbal patterns that constitute a text. Of these, speech and writing are the most generally recognized. The scholarly emphasis on speech and writing, to the exclusion of other communicative modes like memory or gesture, is sometimes expressed as a conceptual binary between orality and literacy.[62] This book does not subscribe to the speech/writing dichotomy. Instead, it seeks to show how multiple modes are interwoven to realize texts.

59. Pangkajawati wrote two colophons stating that her copying of the *Bhomāntaka* lasted from September 9, 1799, to January 22, 1800 (106 leaves in 135 days) and that her copying of the *Sumanasāntaka* lasted from October 1, 1800, to January 28, 1801 (83 leaves in 120 days). Sastrawan, "Violence in the Library," 15–16.

60. This unnamed scribe began copying on April 27, 1879, and concluded on June 1, 1879, (72 leaves in 35 days). Jan Just Witkam, "Inventory of the Oriental Manuscripts of the Library of the University of Leiden," vol. 6 (Ter Lugt Press, 2007–17), 27.

61. Ruth Finnegan, *Communicating: The Multiple Modes of Human Communication*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2014).

62. Walter J. Ong, with additional chapters by John Hartley, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, 3rd ed. (Routledge, 2012).

There are meaningful contrasts to be drawn between the different modes for storing and transmitting texts. A written document has a physical form that lasts until it is so damaged or altered that the writing is no longer legible. Spoken utterances, on the other hand, are ephemeral by nature. They are experienced by a hearing audience, which in premodern times was limited in size by the reach of the human voice. To form an oral tradition, spoken texts must then be stored in memory, in writing, or in another recorded form. Speech, in and of itself, is a means of transmitting texts but not of storing them. Written texts store information, but they must be read or copied for that information to be transmitted. Reading a written text involves converting it into speech (reading aloud), into memory (silent reading), or into another written document (copying by sight).

In real-world settings, writing is very rarely independent of other textual modes. A complete study of written documents should therefore take account of how nonwritten modes have contributed to their production, transmission, and reception.[63] The same applies to historical documents. While the practice of history is usually associated with written texts, it necessarily involves speech and memory as well.[64] To create a historical record, past happenings must first be remembered and then later written down. With very few exceptions, historical events do not instantly produce documentation without human thought intervening in the process. All written records of the past, therefore, involve the nonwritten communicative mode of memory.

Stories about the past are passed down through what is called, in this book, the "oral-mnemonic" transmission of historical knowledge. This kind of textual transmission is the telling of stories in speech, which are remembered by their listeners and then retold from those listeners' recollections to other audiences. It is useful to think of a story's oral-mnemonic transmission as a linked series of occasions of speech and of listeners' recollections of them.

63. These issues, widespread in the scholarship on textual traditions around the world, go back to the earliest surviving examples of recorded history, found in ancient Sumeria. For the interweaving of written and nonwritten modes in this context, see the debate between Piotr Michalowski and Joan Westenholz. Piotr Michalowski, "Orality, Literacy and Early Mesopotamian Literature," in *Mesopotamian Epic Literature: Oral or Aural?*, edited by M. E. Vogelzang and H. L. J. Vanstiphout (Edwin Meller, 1992); Joan Goodnick Westenholz, "Historical Events and the Process of Their Transformations in Akkadian Heroic Traditions," in *Epic and History*, edited by David Konstan and Kurt A. Raaflaub (John Wiley & Sons, 2009).

64. Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*; Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader*, 3rd ed. (Routledge, 2015).

Oral-mnemonic transmission is a mixed mode through which many kinds of historical knowledge can be conveyed. For example, the history of local sites throughout the world is delivered orally from memory by tour guides to curious visitors. Oral-mnemonic traditions are often supported by the presence of physical memorials that serve as memory aids and as validation of their accuracy.

In premodern Java, one type of oral-mnemonic transmission was particularly important: the memorization of a basic plot structure that was extemporaneously fleshed out on each occasion of speech. In this context, meaningful narrative content took precedence over the verbatim recollection of utterances. The oral-mnemonic transmission of historical knowledge in Java differed from that of early Vedic and Buddhist scriptures in South Asia, for example, where word-for-word memorization was of paramount importance.[65] These practices involved systematic training in memory techniques and a deferral of comprehension and interpretation. People thus memorized these sacred texts verbatim before learning their meaning, which improved the syllable-by-syllable accuracy of their transmission. This contrast between plot-focused transmission in Java and sound-focused transmission of South Asian scriptures is crucial to understanding how these texts changed over time.[66]

Oral-mnemonic transmission of the plot-focused type leads to characteristic kinds of variation in texts. After many retellings, characters who are peripheral to the story tend to disappear, names are substituted or shifted between characters, and unstated inferences change into explicit statements. This causes the text to split into divergent lines of transmission, each of them carrying increasingly different versions of events. This process becomes more visible when the different versions are written down, that is, when oral-mnemonic transmission is further interwoven with the mode of writing. The

65. Mark Allon, "The Oral Composition and Transmission of Early Buddhist Texts," in *Indian Insights: Buddhism, Brahmanism and Bhakti*, edited by Peter Connolly and Sue Hamilton (Luzac Oriental, 1997), 54; Jan E. M. Houben, "Vedic Ritual as Medium in Ancient and Pre-colonial South Asia: Its Expansion and Survival between Orality and Writing," in *Veda-Vedāga et Avesta entre oralité et écriture*, edited by J. E. M Houben and J. Rotaru (Bibliothèque de Bucarest, 2010), 153; Sheldon Pollock, "Literary Culture and Manuscript Culture in Premodern India," in *The History of the Book in South Asia*, edited by Francesca Orsini (Routledge, 2013), 4–7.

66. Bhikku Anālayo, "The Vicissitudes of Memory and Early Buddhist Oral Transmission," *Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies* 5 (2009): 6–7.

phenomenon by which historical traditions organically develop divergence and variation over time is explored in depth in chapter 5.

Writing and speech were interwoven in other ways in premodern Java. Recitation, for example, involves speaking or singing aloud by reading a written text. Each act of recitation is based on a particular written document, so it differs both from speaking from memory and from oral composition. The interweaving of manuscript copying and oral recitation is referred to here as "chiro-recitative" transmission. This kind of transmission causes characteristic variations in texts over the long term, such as the substitution of synonymous phrases and the reordering of segments that are metrically equivalent.[67] The involvement of recitation in the copying of manuscripts therefore introduces an element of instability into the transmission of historical evidence. As variant versions of the same text proliferate within manuscript traditions, it becomes difficult for later historians to discern the wording of the original source.

The recitation of written works in Java goes back at least to the tenth century. The final section of the *Virāṭaparva*, a part of the Old Javanese prose *Mahābhārata*, describes the recitation of the text in the presence of the reigning king Dharmavaṁśa Teguh:

> [The king said:] "But I ask you, great sage: For how long now has it been discussed? I have completely forgotten when you started telling the story. So please count the nights, great sage!"
>
> [The sage said:] "Its duration was thirty nights minus one, which would be one night less than the full length of a month. On the fifth, your Majesty was interrupted from the discussion, being burdened by your work. In brief, that was how long it took for the story to be vernacularized."[68]

The text states that the nightly discussion took place between October 14 and November 12, 996. This recitation involved the quotation of verses

67. Amin Sweeney, *A Full Hearing: Orality and Literacy in the Malay World* (University of California Press, 1987); Chambert-Loir, "Variant Versions of the Sulalat al-Salatin," 162–67.

68. "Kunaṅ pataña ra putu saṅ mahāṛṣi, pira lavasniki n ginoṣṭhi maṅke, arddha tan eñāt ra putu saṅ paṇḍita, ri tambayan rahadyan saṅhulun macarita, toh vilaṅən vəṅinya de mahāṛṣi . . . ekonatriṅśadrātri divasanya, kuraṅ savəṅi kamənā yāvakaniṅ salek, riṅ kapiṅ lima rahadyan saṅhulun kasəlaṅan tan pagoṣṭhi, kevyan deni kāryanta, saṅkṣepanya lavas kālaniṅ kathā n pinrākṛta" (Old Javanese). H. H. Juynboll, *Wirāṭaparwwa: Oudjavaansch Prozageschrift* (Martinus Nijhoff, 1912), 97–98.

from the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* followed by Old Javanese elaborations on those verses. The word "discussion" (*goṣṭhi*) may well imply the king's active participation, not only in listening to the recitation but in offering his feedback and interpretations of the text.[69] Since the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* is attributed to the legendary sage Vyāsa, the process of vernacularization is called "Javanizing what Vyāsa designed."[70] Similar practices of recitation, interlingual glossing, and group discussion of canonical texts are well known in modern times.[71]

Written texts and oral expression were also interwoven in theatrical performances. Many people in premodern Java learned stories by watching and participating in theater. The founding charter of the Dalinan monastery (905 CE) is one of several inscriptions that describe performances staged for a public ceremony: "After that, a spectacle was desired. The deity's servant was acting. Nalu, telling the story of prince Bhīma, danced as Kīcaka. Jaluk, telling the story of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, clowned and jested. Mungmuk and Galigī performed theater as service to the deity, telling the story of prince Bimvaya."[72] This description mentions the names and roles of the performers, the types of performance, and their plots drawn from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* story cycles. The repeated term "telling the story of" (*macarita*) refers to the core narrative on which the respective performances are based. It is likely that the stories performed on this occasion existed in written versions too, for example, the mortal combat between Bhīma and Kīcaka is narrated in the same *Virāṭaparva* text that was discussed at the court of Dharmavaṁśa Teguh.[73]

69. Willem van der Molen, "Dharmawangśa's Heritage: On the Appreciation of the Old Javanese Mahābhārata," *Wacana* 12 (2010): 395.

70. *maṅjavākəna Byāsamata* (Old Javanese). Juynboll, *Wirāṭaparwwa*, 8.

71. Zurbuchen, *Language of Balinese Shadow Theater*, 87–95; Ronit Ricci, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (University of Chicago Press, 2011), 42–43.

72. "Kahəlamanya hinyūnakən tontonan mamidu saṅ taṅkil hyaṅ si Nalu macarita Bhīma kumāra maṅigal Kīcaka si Jaluk macarita Rāmāyaṇa mamirus mabañol si Muṅmuk si Galigī mavayaṅ buat hyaṅ macarita Bimvaya kumāra" (4v.9–10) (Old Javanese). The syntax of this passage is rather ambiguous, and other interpretations are possible in regard to which performer acted which part. Quoted edition by Wayan Jarrah Sastrawan and Arlo Griffiths (DHARMA). A partial edition of this inscription was published in F. H. van Naerssen, "Twee koperen oorkonden van Balitung in het Koloniaal Instituut te Amsterdam," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch Indië* 95 (1937), 441–46.

73. Juynboll, *Wirāṭaparwwa*, 23–41.

Old Javanese poems of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries give vivid descriptions of theatrical performances.[74] We also have concrete evidence of written synopses of performances, such as a copperplate inscription now kept in the National Museum of Indonesia. The text is interspersed with the word "laughter" (*pacəh*), suggesting either a cue for the performer to pause for audience responses or a record of such responses on a particular occasion: "They meet a hermit and Usaddha. Usaddha wants to go home. She is not allowed to do so by the hermit. Then Usaddha wants to go to Keling—laughter—the handmaidens want to accompany her—laughter—Usaddha is reluctant. Then she resolves to go and arrives at Keling. She is taken as wife by Ino; they are in love. This is not accepted by his primary wife. Usaddha goes back to Java."[75] A fragment of another Javanese performance synopsis is kept in Royal Library of Denmark.[76] This text is undated but was probably written in the sixteenth or seventeenth century. It mentions the buffoon figure of Semar, who is a central character in the modern Javanese shadow puppet (*wayang kulit*) repertoire. This suggests that the text was used as a prompt or summary for the benefit of puppeteers, similar to the puppetry manuals of later centuries.[77]

Written stories were also interwoven with the pictorial arts. Some of the most striking art of premodern Java survives in relief carving on stone temples, such as Borobudur.[78] These reliefs often depict narratives known from written texts, though the selection and ordering of episodes can

74. Andrea Acri, "Birds, Bards, Buffoons and Brahmans: (Re-)Tracing the Indic Roots of Some Ancient and Modern Performing Characters from Java and Bali," *Archipel* 88 (2014): 13–70; Adrian Vickers, "Reconstructing the History of Panji Performances in Southeast Asia," *Wacana* 21 (2020): 268–84.

75. "Kapaṅgih ta saṅ viku, mvaṅ saṅ Usaddha, aharəp muliha saṅ Usaddha, tan vinehan deni saṅ viku, vəkasan aharəp maraa riṅ vano Kəliṅ saṅ Usaddha, pacəh, aharəp anunuta kaṅ babu-babu, pacəh, alumuh kaṅ Usāddha, vəkasan maṅga, təka ri Kəliṅ, iṅalap taṅ Usaddha, denira Ino, asih sira, tan kinarəpan denira parameśvarī, lakuniṅ Usaddha, mantuk mari Java" (r.3–5) (Old Javanese). Quoted from a forthcoming text edition and English translation by Marine Schoettel and Wayan Jarrah Sastrawan (DHARMA). See also the earlier edition by Boechari, *Prasasti Koleksi Museum Nasional, Jilid I* (Museum Nasional Republik Indonesia, 1985–86), 111.

76. Th. G. Th. Pigeaud, "A Pre-Islamic Mythological Tale," in *Catalogue of Indonesian Manuscripts*, Catalogue of Oriental Manuscripts 2 (Royal Library, 1977), 64–80.

77. Pigeaud, *Literature of Java*, 1:248–51.

78. Jan Fontein, "Sculpture, Text and Tradition at Borobudur: A Reconsideration," in *Narrative Sculpture and Literary Traditions in South and Southeast Asia*, edited by Marijke J. Klokke, Studies in Asian Art and Archaeology 23 (Brill, 2000), 1–18.

FIGURE 6. Scroll theatre (*wayang bèbèr*) performance in Yogyakarta, central Java. Photograph by Kassian Cephas (circa 1902 CE). Public domain.

differ.[79] Stone artifacts are the most durable examples of Javanese narrative art, but stories were also depicted on more perishable materials. Mǎ Huān, a translator on Zhèng Hé's visit to Java in 1413 CE, described a hybrid pictorial-theatrical performance using narrative paintings on paper scrolls: "Sitting cross-legged on the ground, the man takes the picture and sets it up on the ground; each time he unrolls and exposes a section of the picture he thrusts it forward towards his audience, and, speaking with a loud voice in the foreign language, he explains the derivation of this section; [and] the crowd sits round and listens to him, sometimes laughing, sometimes crying, exactly as if the narrator were reciting one of our popular romances."[80] What Mǎ Huān described may have been a precursor of the modern Javanese scroll theatre

79. A. J. Bernet Kempers, "The Kuñjarakarṇa Reliefs of Caṇḍi Jago," in *Kuñjarakarṇa Dharmakathana: Liberation Through the Law of the Buddha—an Old Javanese Poem by Mpu Ḍusun*, edited and translated by A. Teeuw and S. O. Robson, Bibliotheca Indonesica 21 (Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), 203–16; Peter Worsley, "Narrative Bas-Reliefs at Candi Surawana," in *Southeast Asia in the 9th to 14th Centuries*, edited by David G. Marr and A. C. Milner (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1986), 335–67; Klokke, "The Kṛṣṇa Reliefs at Panataran"; Kieven, *Following the Cap-Figure in Majapahit Temple Reliefs*, 23–24.

80. Ma Huan, *Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores*, 97.

(*wayang bèbèr*), in which a performer likewise tells stories while unrolling a painted scroll.[81]

CONDITIONS OF TEXTUALITY

Many historians value written evidence because it is more durable than texts produced through other modes, such as speech and memory. Durability is influenced by the material conditions of writing, such as types of writing material and environments of storage. These conditions are not uniform across the world. To explain why the availability and character of historical evidence differs so much from one place to another, we need to delve into the circumstances that affect the loss and survival of texts. For example, the vast majority of texts in Java were written on organic materials like palm leaf, whose lifespan is very rarely more than a few centuries. Only a tiny handful of manuscripts from premodern Java survive as original artifacts. This has resulted in a profound loss of written evidence of the past, including manuscripts that could have been used as primary sources for historical research.

Reproduction is a common tactic for ensuring the survival of texts. But in Java, the reproducibility of written documents was constrained by the tenacity of handwriting and the absence of mechanized printing. Repeated copying of texts into new manuscripts, sometimes mediated by oral recitation and memory, was a labor-intensive process compared to print reproduction. The lack of printed copies of archival documents, coupled with the perishability of documents on organic materials, severely limited the amount of written evidence that survived from the premodern period. Meanwhile, the interweaving of written and nonwritten modes resulted in distinctive ways of producing, transmitting, and receiving the texts that now constitute the evidence base for the early history of Java.

The specific conditions of textual survival in premodern Java have broader implications for the study of historical practice. The multimodal realization of texts is by no means unique to Java but has parallels throughout the world. Texts shaped by speech and memory do not always match professional historians' expectations of what historical sources should be like. This encourages us to think differently about the textual preconditions of studying the past.

81. Mally Kant-Achilles, Rüdiger Schumacher, and Friederich Seltmann, *Wayang bèbèr: das wiederentdeckte Bildrollen-Drama Zentral-Javas* (F. Steiner, 1990).

The perishability of manuscripts on organic materials is particularly relevant in hot and humid climates, such as those of South America, Central Africa, and South Asia. These are places that scholars once considered to be entirely devoid of history before European intrusion. By elucidating the reasons behind this apparent scarcity of original manuscript sources in tropical environments, this chapter shows why that judgement is unfair. It also highlights the importance of manuscript copying, oral-mnemonic transmission, and other multimodal forms of communication in saving texts from loss. These findings prompt us to consider how the precarity of the past in different parts of the world has generated a multitude of approaches to historical practice.

TWO

Recording the Past

A COMMUNITY'S HISTORICAL PRACTICES are deeply influenced by how it keeps records of the past. A record is a written text containing information about events that are temporally and spatially close to its production.[1] Records are often created with the express purpose of being consulted in the future. But even if they are not intended for posterity, they can serve as evidence for historical study for centuries or even millennia, provided they have the good fortune of surviving that long. The production, storage, and consultation of records determine what evidence can be used to study the past. We therefore need to consider the motivations for making records, the typical forms and content of records, and the diverse ways in which records can be accessed and used. By doing so, we can better understand how habits of recording shape historical practices in different parts of the world.

Records are intimately tied to social organizations. These include not only the state, in the narrow sense of a central sovereign government, but also religious establishments, village communities, chartered companies, and

1. This definition of the term "record" accords with those proposed in recent works on the history of recordkeeping and archives. Geoffrey Yeo defined records as "persistent representations of activities, created by participants or observers of those activities or by their authorized proxies." Randolph Head offered a rather more expansive definition of "record," contrasting it to "document": "*Record* is a broad term used to describe any trace of past action that is produced in some medial form. . . . Written records took physical form through the conjunction of a material substrate, specific medial forms, and a linguistic text. The combination of these elements was a *document*." The definition of record used here resembles Yeo's definition of "record" and Head's definition of "document." Geoffrey Yeo, "Concepts of Record (1): Evidence, Information, and Persistent Representations," *The American Archivist* 70 (2007): 337; Randolph C. Head, *Making Archives in Early Modern Europe: Proof, Information, and Political Record-Keeping, 1400–1700* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 12.

judicial courts, among many others.[2] The ongoing relevance of specific types of record depends on the continuity of social organizations over time. When organizations are disrupted or superseded, their records lose relevance and are at greater risk of loss. Records have been lost in many historical contexts, for instance, in Britain after the withdrawal of Roman authority, in South America at the onset of Iberian domination, and in Java during the decline of its Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms. Once records lose their social relevance, there is little reason for people to invest time and effort into preserving them. They can survive only by being physically durable or by being repurposed in new social contexts.

How records are accessed depends on how they are spatially distributed. The nineteenth-century notion of the archive as a central state-controlled repository of information cannot necessarily be applied to earlier periods.[3] Comparative research on ancient archives in the Mediterranean and the Middle East shows that "archives, especially public ones, were rarely centralised, and official information was stored in multiple repositories."[4] The geographical and institutional dispersal of archives has significant implications for practices of history. A dispersed archive can serve as historical evidence only if people are able to travel to the various repositories where records are stored. If access to records is limited by barriers to mobility or the breakdown of social organizations, then they cannot easily be used to study the past. It is crucial to consider the distribution of archival records, because it explains the kinds of evidence that premodern historians did and did not have access to.

This chapter explores how the production, maintenance, and use of records shape historical practices. First, it investigates the motivations for producing records in premodern societies. Recordkeeping is chiefly motivated by the needs and activities of social organizations, such as kingdoms, villages, and temples. This was the case in premodern Java, where people were compelled to record information about their land holdings, their legal disputes, and their political debts—that is, their interactions with the economy, law, and state.

2. Elizabeth Yale, "The History of Archives: The State of the Discipline," *Book History* 18 (2015): 332–59, especially 336–41.

3. Ann Blair, ed., "Special Issue: Archival Knowledge Cultures in Europe, 1400–1900," *Archival Science: International Journal of Recorded Information* 10 (2010); Alexandra Walsham, "The Social History of the Archive: Record-Keeping in Early Modern Europe," *Past and Present*, Supplement 11 (2016): 9–48.

4. Michele Faraguna, foreword to *Archives and Archival Documents in Ancient Societies*, Legal Documents in Ancient Societies 4, Trieste, September 30–October 1, 2011 (Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2013), 9.

Second, it discusses how such involvement with formal institutions led to a standardization in the format of administrative records. Recordkeeping was a systematic practice in premodern Java, with direct consequences for what these records can and cannot tell us about its history. Finally, the chapter addresses how the dispersed nature of the archive in premodern Java limited chroniclers' access to historical evidence. Severe disruption to the island's social organizations in the sixteenth century exacerbated this problem, leading to a profound discontinuity in historical knowledge between premodern and early modern Java.

MOTIVATIONS FOR KEEPING RECORDS

Records look back to the past and anticipate the future. People write down information because of the specific benefits that writing offers: its relative durability compared to speech, and its relative stability compared to memory. Records need to be durable and stable because their purpose is to give information about past events to readers in the present and the future. Recordkeeping involves a mindful investment of time and effort, which needs to be adequately motivated within its social context. The recording of historical knowledge is especially motivated by the needs of social organizations. These needs include managing land, resolving disputes, establishing legal precedent, supporting political leaders, and paying back political debts. Throughout the world, recordkeeping is particularly associated with the emergence of property relations, legal norms, and state authority.[5]

Institutions loom large in the written records of many premodern societies. The oldest examples of archival records are at least 4,500 years old, found in the early state societies of Egypt and Mesopotamia. A group of ancient Egyptian papyri linked to an official called Merer, who lived during the Fourth Dynasty (circa 2580 BCE), contains accounts of food deliveries and a daily journal of the construction of the Great Pyramid of Khufu.[6] In Mesopotamia during the nineteenth century BCE, a family of Assyrian merchants inscribed clay tablets with correspondence, contracts, and financial records.[7] The records found in these Egyptian and Assyrian cases are

5. Head, *Making Archives in Early Modern Europe*, 3.

6. Hagen, "Archives in Ancient Egypt."

7. Cécile Michel, "Constitution, Contents, Filing and Use of Private Archives: The Case of Old Assyrian Archives (Nineteenth Century BCE)," in *Manuscripts and Archives:*

associated with individuals, and they would conventionally be considered collections of private records, as opposed to belonging to a public state archive. For the earliest periods, it is people's interactions with the economy, the law, and the state that tend to feature most prominently in historical records. That is because these interactions generate the motivations to record information for the long term.

The management of property in land is one of the primary reasons to create and maintain historical records. In premodern Java as elsewhere, detailed information about the use of land and resources was recorded so that it could be referred to in the future, especially when disputes arose over access, control, or revenue. Such records about fixed property are often called "charters" in medieval contexts. Charters were created to serve as evidence that could be consulted long after the deaths of the original participants and witnesses; that is why durable writing supports such as stone and metal were preferred in premodern Java. They sometimes include contextual information to explain and justify the arrangements they describe; in these cases, they are especially valuable for historical research.

Some charters from premodern Java give specific dimensions of demarcated land whose fiscal or legal status was being modified. Boundary stones were inscribed with text about the demarcated zone, for example, a standing stone marking out the Abhayānanda monastery in central Java (826 CE): "The Lord of Bawang's wife demarcated a plot of irrigated rice fields 4 *tampahs* [in area, approximately 4 hectares]."[8] The Śrī Maṅgala II inscription (874 CE) marks out a rectangular plot "forty-four fathoms going south and sixty-seven fathoms going east."[9] For the next six centuries, people in Java continued to demarcate parcels of land using boundary stones with dimensions inscribed on them; the latest known examples of this practice are the Trailokyapuri III and IV charters (1486 CE).[10] The land dimensions contained in these charters

Comparative Views on Record-Keeping, edited by Alessandro Bausi, Christian Brockmann, Michael Friedrich, and Sabine Kienitz (De Gruyter, 2018), 43–70.

8. "Ra Bavaṅ anakvi manusuka sīma savah tampah 4" (2–3) (Old Javanese). Titi Surti Nastiti, "*Watu Sīma* in Java: Marker Stones as Boundaries of Privileged Domains," in *Writing for Eternity: A Survey of Epigraphy in Southeast Asia*, edited by Daniel Perret (École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2018), 192.

9. "Paṅidulnya pataṅ puluh pat ḍəpanya paṅavetannya nəmaṅ puluh pitu ḍəpa" (4–5) (Old Javanese). Titi Surti Nastiti, "*Watu Sīma* in Java," 196.

10. Brandes. *Oud-Javaansche Oorkonden*, 218–26; Titi Surti Nastiti, "*Watu Sīma* in Java," 206.

were enforced by the state; as seen later in the chapter, any parcel of land that did not conform to its charter was considered illegal and had to be rezoned.

The loss of written records was of serious consequence to the communities to whom they pertained, because it could threaten their rights to land and other resources. In premodern Java, the privileges conferred by land grants were intended to be permanent and heritable, as expressed in the stock expression found in charters spanning the ninth to fourteenth centuries: "that it be received and inherited by all of their descendants, now, later, until the future's future."[11] The Warunggahan charter (1305 CE) states that a grant made by a former king had to be reissued because the original copy had been destroyed in an earthquake: "That charter was lost at the time of the earthquake. This was the reason that the children of Pāduka Mpungku Śrī Buddhaketu were sorrowful and did not know what to do. For the benefits of the land grant were not secure, in the opinion of the children of Pāduka Mpungku Śrī Buddhaketu together with their relatives, due to the lack of a charter."[12]

The issuing of land charters was motivated by rulers' desire to prevent legal conflicts and to maintain the continuity of property rights, just as was necessary in the case of Buddhaketu's heirs. This motivation is confirmed in the fourteenth-century chronicle *Deśavarṇana*: "Those [religious foundations] that lacked a charter were ordered to have a charter issued to them by experts in the scriptures, so that their benefits would be secure, would not give rise to disputes, and would be passed down to all their future heirs."[13] The state's desire to guarantee legal privileges was a major motivation for reissuing old records. The preexisting documents were treated as evidence for precedent and could be quoted and copied in subsequent rulings pertaining to

11. "Katəmu kalilirakəna deni vəka vetnya, məne hələm təka ri dəlāhaniṅ dəlāha" (Old Javanese).

12. "Ika taṅ praśasti hilaṅ ri kālaniṅ bhūmikampa, nimittani vəka pāduka mpuṅku śrī Buddhaketu, an śoka tan vriṅ gatya, apan tan apagəh ri kabhuktyaniṅ sīma ri hiḍəpni vəka pāduka mpuṅku śrī Buddhaketu, iniriṅ de samasānak ri tan hananiṅ praśasti" (6r.2–4) (Old Javanese). The text is quoted from Arlo Griffiths's edition (DHARMA). See also the edition by Goenawan A. Sambodo, "Prasasti Waruṅgahan: Sebuah Data Baru dari Masa Awal Majapahit," *Amerta: Jurnal Penelitian and Pengembangan Arkeologi* 36 (2018): 25.

13. "Siṅ katayan praśasti vinəkas praśastyana ri saṅ vidagdha riṅ aji | sthitya phalanya tan patəmaha vivāda tumuse satusnira hələm" (73.2c–d) (Old Javanese). The text is quoted through comparison between published editions and unpublished manuscripts. See the most accessible edition by Th. G. Th. Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th Century: A Study in Cultural History*, 5 vols., Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde Translation Series 4 (Martinus Nijhoff, 1960–63), 1:57.

FIGURE 7. Sobhāmṛta copperplate inscription, a circa fourteenth-century reissue of a tax grant originally issued in 939 CE in eastern Java. British Library MSS Jav. 106, f. 2r. Public domain.

the original grant. Older sources were cited to validate the decision recorded in the new document. Most reissues were based on genuine original records. It is rare to find outright forgeries in the epigraphical corpus of Java, and even reissues that bear traces of inauthenticity had a historical purpose. The occasional instances of tampering simply confirm that such records were taken seriously as historical evidence.[14]

One of the oldest inscriptions in the Old Javanese language is the Harinjing charter. Its original text was issued on or before March 25, 804, but the document survives only as a reissue from the 920s CE.[15] The original charter commemorates "the time when the reverend Dhārī of Culanggi unveiled his demarcation, as the basis for a dam that he was making on the channel at Harinjing."[16] Over a century later, the charter was reissued with an addendum dated September 19, 921, which confirmed the rights of Dhārī's descendants over the demarcated land: "The decree of the deified [king] who died at Twak shall be confirmed by the descendants of the reverend Dhārī who built the channel at Harinjing, which must not be altered by *patihs, wahutas*, or village leaders, and must not be entered by any of the royal tax

14. Arlo Griffiths, "Rediscovering an Old Javanese Inscription: Mpu Mano's Donation in Favor of a Buddhist Dignitary in 888 Śaka," *Archipel* 99 (2020): §8.

15. The calendar elements of this 804 CE date are inconsistent, which in itself is circumstantial evidence for the charter being a reissue. Damais calculated this date by assuming an error in the tens digit of the year, which he emended from 706 Śaka to 726 Śaka. Other interpretations are possible, including an even earlier date of issue in 784 CE. Louis-Charles Damais, "Études d'épigraphie indonésienne: IV. Discussion de la date des inscriptions," *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 47 (1955): 187; Arlo Griffiths, Titi Surti Nastiti, and Wayan Jarrah Sastrawan, "The Earliest Documents in Old Javanese," *Wacana* 26 (2025): 333–43.

16. "Tatkāla bhagavanta Dhārī i Culaṅgi sumakṣyan sīmanira n mūla ḍavuhan gavaynira kali i Hariñjiñ" (a.2–4) (Old Javanese). Quoted from the text edition by Eko Bastiawan and Arlo Griffiths (DHARMA).

officials."[17] The original 804 CE charter was quoted in full before the start of the 921 CE addendum, to serve as evidence that the demarcation had been created by Dhārī a century earlier. The purpose of reissuing the old charter was to establish a factual basis for the new decision. This in turn justified the subsequent decision to confirm the tax exemption for Dhārī's descendants.

Litigation was a major reason for producing and consulting written records. The judicial system in premodern Java used records to avert and manage conflicts over land and resources. The case of Dhanadī, recorded in the tenth-century Wurudu Kidul inscription, illustrates this. On April 20, 922, Dhanadī was issued a "victory document" (*jayapattra*) certifying that she was a descendant of free inhabitants of the village of Wurudu and that therefore she too was a free person. On May 6, 922, Dhanadī was issued another document certifying her Javanese identity against an accusation by a tax official that she was of Khmer descent. This official had twice been sent written summonses by the presiding magistrates, and his failure to comply with them resulted in Dhanadī's victory by default. Both documents were then copied onto metal plates "so that there will not be [further] discussion [about this] in the future."[18] At every stage of the proceedings, written documents were invoked to provide evidence for the facts of the case and to implement the court's decisions.

Once disputes arose, they could be resolved by recourse to written records. The Wintang Mas II inscription (919 CE) records how a conflict over the upkeep of a religious foundation was adjudicated by consulting a written charter. Three nobles had received a grant from a previous king that exempted them from paying for the foundation's upkeep, which was then assigned to the lord of the local district of Mangulihi. When the trio wrongly continued to be charged for the upkeep, they defended their privilege: "The copperplate charter was shown to the Chief Minister, Lord of Hino, *pu* Ketuvijaya, because the upkeep cost of the holy foundation was [supposed to be] supplied solely by the Lord of Mangulihi."[19] This evidence was considered decisive

17. "Śāsana saṅ devata lumah i Tvak kapagəhakənani vəka bhagavānta Dhārī saṅ magavai kali i Hariñjiṅ ikanaṅ tan kolahala deni patih vahuta rāma mvaṅ tan katamana deniṅ saprakārani maṅila[la] dṛ̥vya haji" (b. 7–9) (Old Javanese). Quoted from the text edition by Eko Bastiawan and Arlo Griffiths (DHARMA).

18. "Yathānya tan hana vuvusa riṅ dəlāhaniṅ dəlāha" (11.16) (Old Javanese). Quoted from the text edition by Arlo Griffiths (DHARMA).

19. "Pinintonakən ikanaṅ tāmrapraśasti, i rakryān mapatih i Hino pu Ketuvijaya, saṅkā yan sinukṛ̥ta pamuatnikana saṅ hyaṅ dharma atah de samgat Maṅulihi" (11.7–8) (Old

by the authorities: "The Chief Minister's response was exactly the same: he ordered that the [original] grant be confirmed."[20] Written records helped to guarantee that one's rights and privileges would be upheld, which is why they played such an important role in the administration and law of premodern Java.

When such records were absent, other forms of local knowledge were solicited. A vivid example of this process is described in the Manah i Manuk ruling, issued sometime in the 1350s CE. This document, inscribed on metal plates, records an adjudication between two parties claiming ownership of a large agricultural estate. The "defendants" (those who held de facto possession of the estate) prevailed over the challengers, because they were able to argue that "there is no written record, since these privileges have existed since time immemorial. The evidence for this is a building of my ancestor, a pavilion in the settlement of Kasedahan dated 919 Śaka [997 CE]."[21] The oral testimony of neighbors was also sought, but it was inconclusive: "Then the officials were sent to inquire among the impartial neighbors about the merits and faults of each side, but the neighbors reported that although they had heard that the benefice had been pawned, the source of that information was unknown."[22]

The magistrates ultimately ruled against the challengers because there was no valid evidence that their ancestors had pawned the land for a payment of silver, and so it was impossible to know whether their claims were true. Neither side was able to provide detailed written evidence for ownership, but the defendants prevailed because they could refer to the dated pavilion as evidence of their family's association with the land. On the other hand, the challengers could not provide any evidence, whether written or

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Javanese). Quoted from the text edition by Tyassanti Kusumo Dewanti and Arlo Griffiths (DHARMA).

20. "Ndān maṅkanātah sahur rakryān mapatih makon umagəhakəna anugraha" (1r.8) (Old Javanese). Quoted from the text edition by Tyassanti Kusumo Dewanti and Arlo Griffiths (DHARMA).

21. "Tan hana suvanda [*recte* subhāṇḍa?], apan anādi kabhuktyanipun, makavyakti kīrtini tuha-tuhaniṅsun bale i maṇḍala i Kasəḍahan, śakakāla 919" (5r.2–3) (Old Javanese). Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th Century*, 1:106.

22. "Atəhər taṇḍa rakryan motus ataña-taña irikaṅ piṅgi siriṅ udāsina, polihana nyāyānyanikaṅ pakṣa kalih kunaṅ pājarnikaṅ piṅgir siriṅ, aṅruṅu yan sīma sasaṇḍan ndan avidhita ta saṅkaniṅ ujar" (6r.2–3) (Old Javanese). Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th Century*, 1:106.

oral, to prove that the land had ever been pawned.[23] The overall lack of evidence available in the Manah i Manuk case made for a convoluted judicial process. This example illustrates why the state wished to forestall such disputes by producing and keeping legal records in durable written form.[24]

The value of documentary evidence in litigation is emphasized in the Old Javanese law text *Svayambhu*, a vernacular paraphrase of the eighth book of the Indian Sanskrit treatise *Mānavadharmaśāstra*.[25] The *Svayambhu* distinguishes three types of evidence that a creditor must provide in order to prove that a debt exists: witnesses, documents, and receipt of interest.[26] The *Kuṭāramānava*, a later text of the same genre as the *Svayambhu*, places these three types of evidence in a hierarchy: "Witnesses are overruled by written documents, and documents are overruled by receipt of interest."[27] The *Kuṭāramānava* goes on to elaborate the stringent requirements for a debt contract document to be considered valid: "The creditor must make efforts to write down the name of the debtor, including their village and hamlet. . . . The year, month, lunar day [*tithi*], fortnight, seven-day weekday, five-day weekday, six-day weekday, as well as the week name, must be written down, and foremost of all, the size of the debt including its interest as well as the witnesses."[28] This notion of three types of evidence is absent in the original Sanskrit text as transmitted in India, so it is probably a local innovation that may reflect existing customary practice in Java. The importance of

23. Th. Pigeaud gave a helpful analysis of the legal arguments presented by both parties in this case, and why the defendants won. Jan Wisseman Christie likewise emphasized that the challengers' lack of written evidence was the decisive factor in their defeat. Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th Century*, 4:393–98; Jan Wisseman Christie, "Debt and Credit," 47.

24. Boechari, *Melacak Sejarah Kuno Indonesia Lewat Prasasti*, 237–48.

25. The *Svayambhu* bears no date, but from text-internal features, we can estimate its date of composition between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries. This important treatise is the subject of a forthcoming edition by Timothy Lubin and Arlo Griffiths (DHARMA).

26. "The three arguments: documents, witnesses, receipt," "*tripakṣa, likhita, sākṣi, bhukti*," (§93) (Old Javanese). Quoted from the edition by Timothy Lubin and Arlo Griffiths.

27. "Sākṣi alah deniṅ pasusuratan, pasusuratan alah deniṅ bhukti" (§74) (Middle Javanese). Quoted from the edition by J. C. G. Jonker, *Een Oud-Javaansch Wetboek, vegeleken met Indische rechtsbronnen* (Brill, 1885), 51.

28. "Denprayatna deniṅ apiḥutaṅ tulisakəna aran iṅ ahutaṅ təkaniṅ deśane bañjare . . . tulisakəna tahune māsa-tithine taṅgal-paṅloṅe, saptavārane, pañcavārane, ṣaḍvārane, lāvan vukune, makādi guṅe hutaṅe, təkaniṅ putrane den saha sākṣi" (§72) (Middle Javanese). Jonker, *Een Oud-Javaansch Wetboek*, 50–51.

written evidence for debt management highlights the essential role of record-keeping in the judicial practices of premodern Java.[29]

Political support for rulers was another motivation for producing written records. One effective way of garnering support was through arguments for the legitimacy of a particular monarch to rule. In premodern Java, such arguments were often based on three criteria: royal descent, invincibility in combat, and ritual confirmation.[30] Researchers have emphasized, sometimes excessively, the importance of legitimation in Javanese historiography.[31] A more balanced perspective sees the legitimation of monarchs as one among several motivations for producing historical records. Rather than giving uncritical praise to kings and queens, Javanese historians judged them against a standard of beneficent royal power informed by examples from the mythological repertoire, particularly the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*. These norms ultimately drew on Indian traditions codified in the *Arthaśāstra*, an influential Sanskrit treatise on statecraft compiled in many stages from the first century BCE onward.[32] Monarchs were judged according to how well or how poorly they lived up to this ideal model of royal power.

Public support mattered to monarchs in premodern Java. Rulers sought to consolidate power by granting privileges to political stakeholders in return for their loyalty and service. Such privileges were often commemorated in royal charters, which framed them as a repayment of a debt of gratitude, literally a "prior debt" (*pūrvaṛṇa*). These charters sometimes describe the historical circumstances in which the monarch first incurred the debt of gratitude. The beneficiaries were not necessarily the most powerful people in the kingdom; sometimes individual villages were rewarded for supporting the monarch in war. The Baru inscription (1030 CE) reports that a village had

29. A useful summary of premodern law on credit and debit in the region is given in Jan Wisseman Christie, "Preliminary Notes on Debt and Credit in Early Island Southeast Asia," in *Credit and Debt in Indonesia, 860–1930: From Peonage to Pawnshop, from Kongsi to Cooperative*, edited by David Henley and Peter Boomgaard (ISEAS, 2009).

30. J. J. Ras, "Geschiedschrijving en de legitimiteit van het koningschap op Java," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 150 (1994): 518–38.

31. C. C. Berg, "The Javanese Picture of the Past," in *An Introduction to Indonesian Historiography*, edited by Soedjatmoko (Cornell University Press, 1965), 87–118; Wade, "Southeast Historical Writing." Sheldon Pollock offered an incisive critique of modern scholars' excessive reliance on legitimation as a catchall explanation for South and Southeast Asian historical sources. Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 516–24.

32. Patrick Olivelle, *King, Governance, and Law in Ancient India: Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 25–31.

provided sanctuary to the king Airlangga during a war against his enemies, and as a result, "the king had a very great prior debt toward all those who had helped him."[33] The Hantang inscription (1135 CE) explains the benefits given to a village as thanks for their military assistance to the king Jayabhaya. Of particular note is the reciprocity implied by the element "mutual agreement" (*ubhaya*) in the official term "kindly agreed to" (*inubhaya sanmata*): "When the repulse came, Jayabhaya's side was strengthened, and this created a prior debt, which is the reason why their request was kindly agreed to by the king."[34] Monarchs in premodern Java relied on concepts like "prior debt" and "mutual agreement" to secure political support.[35] Royal leaders and their subjects were not equal in status, of course, but their relationships were reciprocal and interdependent. Both sides were party to debts and agreements that were documented on stone and metal. The need to support royal power, both through legitimation and through transaction, was thus a crucial motivation for recording knowledge about past events.

These motivations matter because they shape people's choices to record, in durable forms, the historical information that is important to them and to their descendants. The emergence of recordkeeping in premodern Java was tied to the development of certain social organizations and institutions: landed property, judicial systems, religious foundations and estates, village councils, and royal courts. The overarching purpose of producing records was to maintain the continuity and stability of these institutions, as well as to establish or to renew them. It is unsurprising that the historiography of premodern Java, like that of any premodern society, exhibits a sharp focus on the organizations that produced durable records. The continuity of the historical record was closely entwined with the continuity of social organizations. Just how closely entwined can be seen in the formal standardization of Javanese recordkeeping under the influence of these organizations from the eighth to the fifteenth century.

33. "Apan atyanta gəṅni pūrvaṛṇa śrī mahārā(ja) ri sakvehni sahāyaniran" (a.12) (Old Javanese). This is quoted from the edition by Eko Bastiawan and Arlo Griffiths (DHARMA).

34. "Ri kālani panuval kevalāpagəh ya pakṣa Jayabhaya ya ta agave pūrvaṛṇa karaṇanya n inubhaya sanmata paṅhyaṅnya de śrī mahārāja" (Ab.14–15) (Old Javanese). This is quoted from the edition by Eko Bastiawan and Arlo Griffiths (DHARMA).

35. Other Javanese inscriptions that use these terms are Garaman (1053 CE), Mula Malurung (1255 CE), Parablyan (late thirteenth century CE), Kudadu (1294 CE), Sukhāmṛta (1296 CE), and Tuhanyaru (1323 CE).

THE STANDARDIZATION OF RECORDS

Records from premodern Java tend to have standard formats. These formats served as templates for producing records and set expectations for how they should function in their social contexts. The persistence of these standard formats over many centuries confirms the involvement of social organizations in the production of records, and it also attests to a high degree of conservatism in the practices of recordkeeping. The most significant genres of record found in the Old Javanese epigraphical corpus are dated commemorations, tax grants, royal panegyrics, legal rulings, and short decrees.

Dated commemorations are the most abundant kind of Javanese inscription. They sometimes include short descriptions of the event they commemorate, often the construction of a building or installation of a statue. For example, a limestone cave near the village of Gosari in East Java is inscribed with a description of repairs done in 1376 CE (expressed as year 1298 of the Śaka era): "The time of the staircase • 1298 • the moment when it was repaired by the village elders all together, in first place the elder [called] Ajrah, who protected its elevation."[36] When dated commemorations do not provide detailed descriptions, their historical significance must be gleaned from context. A series of dates on buildings in the Panataran temple complex, spanning 1299 CE to 1415 CE, give the impression of a graduated expansion of the site, though no such process is explicitly mentioned.[37] Such basic dated inscriptions were supplemented by other forms of historical knowledge, such as oral-mnemonic traditions preserved by local communities. Dated commemorations were produced to remind people of specific events in their past. As contexts changed and memories of the event faded, these records became increasingly difficult to interpret, especially if they were removed from their original locations.

Another important genre of record in premodern Java was the tax grant. The function of tax grants was to certify the transfer of some part of a

36. "Divasaniṅ ambal • 1298 • duk vinahon denira saṅ rama samadaya, makadi sira buyut Ajrah + talikur sira kaduruhane" (Old Javanese). The text is edited by Arlo Griffiths. The words *talikur* and *kaduruhan* are not attested in existing dictionaries of Old Javanese. As a result, the interpretation of the second half of the text is still provisional. Arlo Griffiths, "Sebuah prasasti pada tebing bukit karang di Gosari (Ujung Pangkah, Gresik, Jawa Timur)," in *Bengawan Solo: Riwayatmu Dulu* (Pusat Arkeologi Nasional, 2013), 32–33.

37. Hadi Sidomulyo, "New Archaeological Data from Mt Penanggungan, East Java," in *The Creative South: Buddhist and Hindu Art in Mediaeval Maritime Asia*, vol. 2, edited by Andrea Acri and Peter Sharrock (ISEAS, 2022), 226n53.

community's revenue or labor to a certain beneficiary. They recorded a decision made at a specific time by a high authority, often but not always the monarch, which was then passed down an administrative hierarchy to the beneficiary in question. This type of record was especially associated with a parcel of land called a *sīma* (benefice), defined as a productive zone that was obliged to supply revenue and labor to particular beneficiaries.[38] Tax grant records prescribe the fiscal relationships between villages, religious institutions, a range of specialized occupations, and royal or aristocratic leaders. They were produced and maintained as part of a formalized network of obligations that were legally enforceable. As such, they depended on the ongoing continuity of the social organizations that underpinned them. These organizations were severely disrupted during the sixteenth century, and as a result, the tax grant records that had possessed the force of law for centuries earlier became permanently irrelevant for legal purposes.

Tax grant records could be issued on stone and on metal plates, most often of a copper alloy such as bronze. As discussed in the previous chapter, charters were also written on leaves (*ripta*), but due to their perishability, no examples of palm-leaf charters survive from the premodern period. Tax grants were predominantly written in the Old Javanese language, with occasional verse stanzas or short prose passages in Sanskrit. These records gained a standard format in the ninth century that hardly changed up to the fifteenth century, containing the following elements in order:

- Date
- Highest issuing authority
- List of lower authorities
- Occasion for the grant
- Terms and conditions of the grant

38. The *sīma* institution is found through southern Asia in the medieval period. Deriving from a Sanskrit term for "boundary," the *sīma* in premodern Java was the predominant method of demarcating land, managing its revenue and labor, and regulating its economic activity. The scholarship on Javanese *sīma* is extensive; for an up-to-date treatment, see the 2018 chapter by Titi Surti Nastiti. The Sīma Anglayang inscription (late 1040s CE) records a unique instance of a non-localized "floating *sīma*" (*sīma anglayang*), which covered a mobile group of foreign merchants in Java. Titi Surti Nastiti, "*Watu Sīma* in Java," 189–221; Titi Surti Nastiti, Eko Bastiawan, and Arlo Griffiths, "Towards a Corpus of Inscriptions Issued During Airlangga's Reign in Eastern Java: A Provisional Inventory and Three New Inscriptions," *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 108 (2022): 63–216.

- Witnesses and parties to the grant
- Description of a ceremony
- Curse formula

Not all these elements are always present in the document.[39] The occasion and curse sections of the grants are sometimes omitted, while the ceremonial description is found only in charters of the ninth and tenth centuries. The date is often given in an elaborate form, including not only solar and lunar calendar elements but various astronomical elements as well; later charters tend to show more elaborate date formulas than earlier ones.[40] By and large, the overall standardization of these tax grant records is more remarkable than their minor variations of detail over time. Long strings of formulaic expressions, apparently copied from shared templates, recur throughout the corpus, particularly those concerning officials, occupations, and fines.

Tax grants can be considered historical records for two reasons. First, original tax grants are contemporary dated records of a specific administrative decision involving various social actors. They were consulted as authoritative sources of information, particularly during disputes over legal privileges or for surveys of property holdings. Second, the occasion section of a tax grant sometimes includes a narrative description of the circumstances that led to the decision being made. Often framed in terms of the prior debt of gratitude discussed above, these sections can provide lengthy accounts of historical events. The remarkably detailed Wanua Tengah III (908 CE), Pucangan (1041 CE), and Kudadu (1294 CE) charters include a great deal of historical information in their occasion sections.

Records were also used to inform people of legal decisions. As we have seen, judicial systems in premodern Java published their rulings in written form, particularly those involving long-term rights and obligations, such as land ownership and debt payments. The rulings on specific cases were recorded on durable materials to prevent them from being challenged in the future. There are two types of legal ruling that survive from premodern Java: *jayapattra* (victory document), which records a successful litigation like that of Dhanadī above, and *viśuddhapattra* (acquittance document), which

39. F. H. van Naerssen, "Old Javanese Charters Re-edited and Translated," in *Catalogue of Indonesian Manuscripts*, Catalogue of Oriental Manuscripts 2 (Royal Library, 1977), 54–55.

40. J. G. de Casparis, *Indonesian Chronology* (Brill, 1978), 55–56.

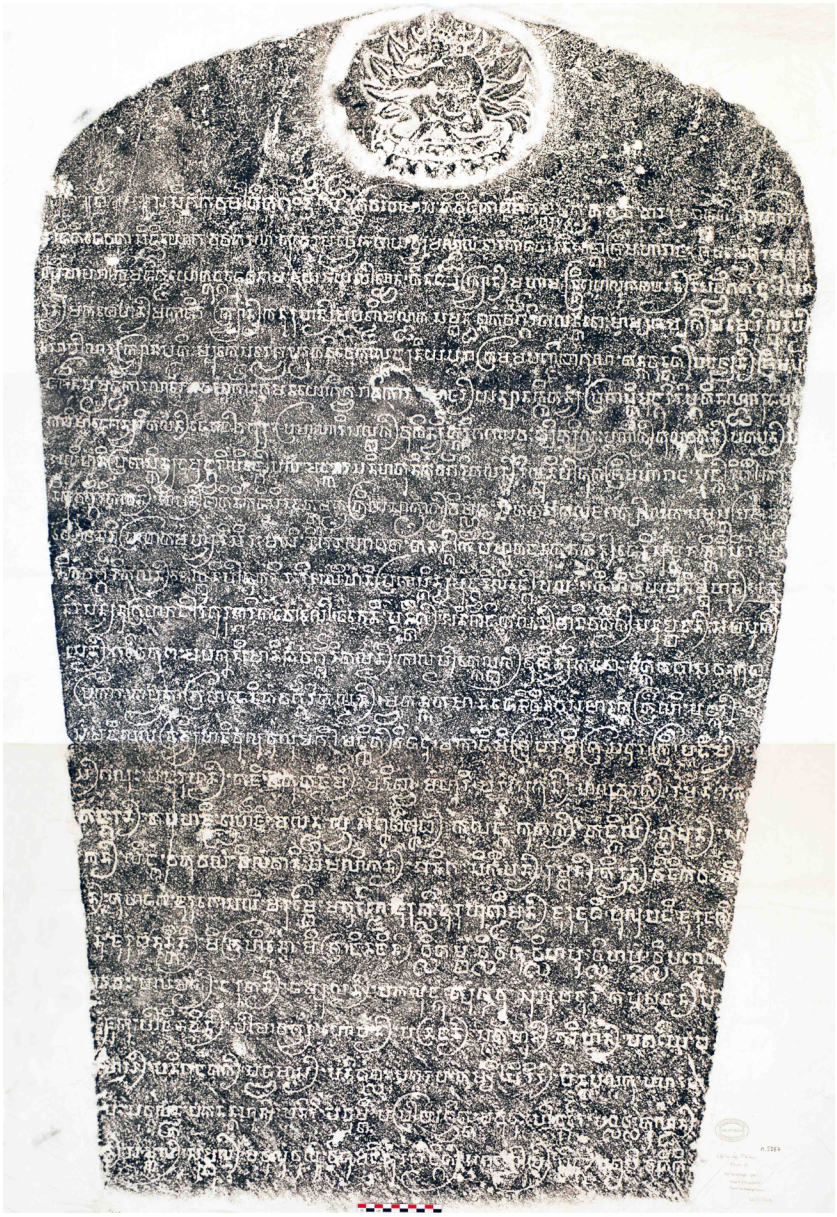

FIGURE 8. Inked rubbing of the Talan stone inscription, *in situ* near Blitar, eastern Java (issued 1136 CE). Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient estampage number 2287 (produced in 2012). CC 4.0.

records the clearance of a debt.[41] Examples of legal rulings are found from the ninth to the fourteenth century, with the following standard format:

- Date
- Facts of the case or debt
- Ruling
- Witnesses

The standard format of legal rulings reflects the formality of the judicial system, which mediated the rights and obligations of individuals and other institutions. The production of standardized records of legal outcomes, as well as their consultation as a kind of evidence for past events, was a natural consequence of such a system.

Another standard format of historical record is the royal panegyric, in which powerful leaders are praised in idealized and formulaic language. These records belong to a Sanskrit genre of panegyric called *praśasti*. They employ the poetic conventions of the *kāvya* genre of poetry, which developed in the mid-first millennium CE in the Sanskrit cosmopolis, particularly in India, Cambodia, and Java. This genre of royal panegyric may have had even older roots in India, since hymns in praise of heroes and donors was the "seminal genre" of that region's historical writing in the first millennium BCE.[42] The philologist Sheldon Pollock describes the "standard *praśasti* style" as being constituted by a number of elements: "the fixing of genealogical succession, the catalogue of kingly traits of the dynasty, and a panegyric of the ruling lord."[43]

The principal feature of royal panegyrics from premodern Java is the description of rulers in idealized terms, making use of *kāvya* conventions, the Sanskrit language, and quantitative verse meters. Royal panegyrics are historical records because they narrate real events, such as the installation of a deity statue in a temple, though they are often couched in formulaic

41. Elsa Clavé and Arlo Griffiths, "The Laguna Copperplate Inscription: Java, Luzon and the notion of a Malay World," *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 70 (2022): 167–242.

42. Romila Thapar, *The Past Before Us: Historical Traditions of Early North India* (Harvard University Press, 2013), 128.

43. Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 119.

language drawn from fictional poetry like the *Rāmāyaṇa*.[44] Historical figures are explicitly compared to divine or heroic personages and are described as having ideal qualities, such as being learned in the scriptures, generous in distributing their wealth, victorious in battle, and assiduous in performing sacrifices. Royal panegyrics written in premodern Java exhibit a standard format:

- Genealogy of the monarch
- Praise of the monarch
- Contextual narrative
- Dated description of a royal act

The earliest surviving examples of Sanskrit royal panegyric from Java date from the fifth or sixth century, written in western Java to praise the king Pūrṇavarman. Royal panegyrics were also produced in central Java during the eighth and ninth centuries; important examples from this period include the Canggal charter (732 CE), the Dinaya charter (760 CE), the Kalasan charter (778 CE), and the Kelurak charter (782 CE). Later royal panegyrics are found in the Sanskrit part of the Pucangan charter (1041 CE), the Wurare inscription (1289 CE), and the Sanskrit parts of the Waringin Pitu charter (1447 CE).

From the ninth century onward, literary culture in Java underwent a general process of vernacularization, with Old Javanese replacing Sanskrit as the preferred language in a wide range of genres. For example, the Śivagṛha inscription (856 CE) is a royal panegyric in the Old Javanese language that closely conforms to *praśasti* conventions.[45] This vernacularization process led to a new genre of panegyric emerging in inscriptions, in which Old Javanese prose is the main linguistic register of the text, containing long strings of uninflected Sanskrit text within it.[46] There are, however, important differences between the Sanskrit *praśasti* and the Old Javanese panegyric: in

44. Arlo Griffiths, "The Problem of the Ancient Name Java and the Role of Satyavarman in Southeast Asian International Relations Around the Turn of the Ninth Century CE," *Archipel* 85 (2013): 57.

45. J. G. de Casparis, *Prasasti Indonesia II: Selected Inscriptions from the 7th to the 9th Century A.D.* (Bandung: Masa Baru, 1956), 280–330.

46. The genre of Old Javanese vernacular panegyrics developed in a similar way to the Tamil panegyrics under the late Pallava and the Chola dynasties. Emmanuel Francis, "Praising the King in Tamil During the Pallava Period," in *Bilingual Discourse and Cross-Cultural Fertilisation: Sanskrit and Tamil in medieval India*, edited by Whitney Cox and Vincenzo

the vernacular version of the genre, genealogies tend to be absent, prose rather than verse is the norm, and dates tend to appear at the beginning of the text. This kind of vernacular panegyric was especially popular in Java from the twelfth to the fifteenth century.[47] Shorter passages of panegyric text could also be embedded within records of other genres, such as tax grants.

A simpler type of administrative record in premodern Java was the short decree. These decrees have a relatively basic structure and serve to record a specific command given by a political authority. Short decrees are known only from a brief period between 1350 CE and 1450 CE in eastern Java and in neighboring Bali.[48] Their language exhibits an unusually colloquial register for a state document; the authority uses the first-person pronoun *ingong* (I), rather than the third-person perspective that is usually adopted in epigraphical records (for example, "the king commanded"). Short decrees conform strictly to a single standard format, which indicates that they were centrally mass produced:

- Address to recipients
- Command of the authority
- Curse formula
- Date

The address section uses standard terms such as "let it be known by," "let it be adhered to by," and "that is my letter," followed by a list of recipients. The optional curse formula before the date is found occasionally and is usually brief. In several cases, short decrees are appended to each other, producing a series of linked decrees written on a single artifact.

It is not surprising that the surviving epigraphical records of premodern Java should belong to only a few standard types. These records described and

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Vergiani (Institut Français de Pondichéry, 2013), 359–409, https://books.openedition.org/ifp/2915.

47. Important examples include the Sukhāmṛta (1296 CE) and Waringin Pitu (1447 CE) inscriptions, which are considered in greater depth as examples of royal panegyric in chapter 4.

48. These are the Biluluk decrees (1366 CE, 1391 CE, 1395 CE), the Renek decree (1379 CE), the Walandit decrees (1381 CE, 1405 CE), the Tamblingan decrees (1384 CE, 1398 CE), the Patapan decrees (1385 CE, 1418 CE), the Tirah decree (1387 CE), the Katiden decree (1392 CE), the Selamandi decrees (1394 CE, 1395 CE, 1396 CE), the Lumpang decree (1395 CE), the Paguhan decree (1416 CE), and the Besakih decrees (1444–1458 CE). Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th Century*, 1:115–25; Goris, "Poera Běsakih," 279.

prescribed the business of social organizations, and they were essential to the management of formal relationships among various stakeholders. The standard formats of records indicate that they were produced systematically and in accordance with preexisting norms and models, not ad hoc or from scratch on each occasion. These factors have direct implications for the kind of evidence that is available to historians, both those who lived in the premodern period and those who conduct research in the present day. Study of the past, whenever it is done, necessarily focuses on those organizations for which records are available. It is more difficult to preserve the historical memory of communities whose records are scarce. The challenge of access to historical evidence in premodern Java was further exacerbated by the geographical dispersal of records and the institutional disruptions of the sixteenth century, to which we turn now.

DISPERSED ARCHIVES

The recordkeeping practices described above produced a significant body of texts that can be considered a historical archive.[49] Written texts occupied a privileged position in this archive, as shown by the state's enthusiasm for documenting the rights and obligations of individuals and organizations. In premodern Java, such archival documents were distributed throughout the landscape rather than being exclusively concentrated in a central government repository. This localization led to the phenomenon of the dispersed archive,

49. The definition of an archive is a long-standing and sometimes contentious issue in the history and theory of recordkeeping. Whereas earlier scholarship often defined the term "archive" narrowly as a state-controlled public repository of information for long-term use (as opposed to the more immediate purposes of records), more recent scholarship such that of Eric Ketelaar has tended to question the distinction between records and archives. Figurative uses of the term "archive" emerged in the 1970s in the post-structuralist philosophy of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, whose influence has been widespread in the humanities at large, but especially in critical theory. In this book, archives are meant in their literal sense only, as collections of written records, or as Michelle Caswell puts it, "actually existing archives." Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, translated by Eric Prenowitz (University of Chicago Press, 1996); Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith (Pantheon, 1972), 126–31; Eric Ketelaar, "Archives in and Archives out: Early Modern Cities as Creators of Records and as Communities of Archives," *Archival Science* 10 (2010), 203–4; Michelle Caswell, "'The Archive' Is Not an Archives: Acknowledging the Intellectual Contributions of Archival Studies," *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture* 16 (2016).

whereby knowledge about the past could be obtained by consulting archives in many places. To learn relevant information about the past, historians had to travel large distances to gain access to records, local consultants, and memorials that provided information about different parts of the country.

Stone and metal records, though both inscribed on durable inorganic materials, had different uses and functions in premodern Java. Tax grants inscribed on heavy standing stones were installed at the sites to which they pertained. They thus served as permanent records of decisions made about economically significant land. These records in stone were largely immovable and therefore implanted historical information directly in the landscape itself. Records on metal plates, being more portable, had different advantages. They were kept by the beneficiaries or other parties of interest in a legal decision, with a duplicate copy sometimes kept by the royal court as well.[50] Because they were more closely attached to communities than to land, documents on metal plates could move across the landscape as circumstances changed. A trove of metal-plate charters found on the slopes of Mount Penanggungan in eastern Java had previously been collected and brought there from the nearby Surabaya plains, accompanying the uphill migration of the communities who owned them.[51] Stone and metal inscriptions were thus scattered throughout the countryside. As palm-leaf records quickly perished in the tropical climate, this dispersed archive became the chief surviving evidence for the history of premodern Java.

Written records were used as sources of authoritative information about local property relations. The chronicle *Deśavarṇana* describes a visit to a monastery called Darbaru in 1359 CE, where the narrator "asked the abbot about the properties of the estate and was shown a document. This fine charter was read out and brought about a clear understanding."[52] Later on, the chronicle

50. Hadi Sidomulyo, "Notes on the Topography of Ancient Java: Identifying Four *Sīma* Territories from the Majapahit Period," in *Writing for Eternity: A Survey of Epigraphy in Southeast Asia*, edited by Daniel Perret (École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2018), 226.

51. These inscriptions were produced in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, including a later reissue of an inscription dated 909 CE. The toponyms mentioned in the texts show that they were moved from their original lowland locations. This movement may have been the result of these communities being driven into mountainous areas during the political tumult of the early sixteenth century. Sidomulyo, "Notes on the Topography of Ancient Java," 226.

52. "Tinakvanakən aṁśa punpunanikā ri saṅ sthāpaka | likhita tinonakən rasika supraśasti vinacāmaṅun vaspada" (35.2c–d) (Old Javanese). Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th Century*, 1:26.

describes a royal foundation at Simping in 1361 CE, whose boundaries were redrawn because "its dimensions evidently did not conform to the charter."[53] In both cases, the chief concern was the accuracy of the locally kept charter as evidence for the original boundaries of the estate in question. The central government treated the dispersed records of local estates as authoritative, and it assiduously strove to put into effect the prescriptions that they contained.

Royal administrators used dispersed archives to consolidate their control over the kingdom's economy. Information was obtained by taking surveys and checking the documentation held by rural institutions. The *Deśavarṇana* describes this policy: "The status of all the districts of Java had already been checked when they were visited previously: the foundations, benefices, parcels, renunciate communities, monasteries, and hermitages. All those with certification were confirmed, and any that lacked reliable certification reverted to the district officials [that is, their privileges were revoked]. Thus they were redesignated by the Lord Rāmādhirāja. The prince of Wengker sent out missions to check the districts and to describe them all; the prince of Singhasari sent out missions to check the size of the clustered settlements and all their property."[54] The dispersed character of the archive in premodern Java is underscored by the fact that missions were sent out to inspect all the districts individually. The archives of the central palace were compared to the archives of local communities throughout the countryside. By conducting these inspections and surveys, the royal courts strove to achieve accuracy, consistency, and standardization in the records that underpinned their administration.

The dispersal of records in premodern Java extended to its neighboring islands. This is particularly evident in the late fourteenth century, when Bali was directly administered from the royal capital Majapahit, almost five hundred kilometers away in eastern Java. Several charters found in Bali were issued by rulers in Java, and their paleography and standardized format closely resemble those of other charters written in Java during the same

53. "Tekaṅ parimāṇa tapva pinatut vyaktinya lavan praśasti" (62.1a) (Old Javanese). Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th Century*, 1:46.

54. "Sampun taṅ sarvadeśeṅ Java tinapak adəgnyeki ṅūni n linakvan | dharma mvaṅ sīma len vaṁśa [*recte* aṁśa] hila-hila hyaṅ kuṭi mvaṅ kalagyan | sakvehniṅ sapramāṇa pinagəhakən asiṅ nispramāṇa ginəgvan | mantuk riṅ deśabhṛtya n sinalahakən i saṅ narārya Rāmādhirāja ‖ śrī natheṅ Vəṅkər otus manapaka rikanaṅ deśa sakvehnya varṇan | śrī natheṅ Siṁhasāry otus anapaka ri gəṅniṅ ḍapur saprakāra" (79.1a–2b) (Old Javanese). Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th Century*, 1:61.

period.[55] This indicates that they were probably produced in Java and then transported to Bali. The Batur Pura Abang C inscription (1384 CE) details how two villages in Bali's highlands, called Er Abang and Pamuteran, submitted their territorial dispute to the king in Majapahit for resolution. A major factor in the king's consideration was a preexisting document, which was referred to as "the charter of Er Abang, being the grant of a previous king over there in Bali."[56] This older local charter was consulted, and its stipulations were reconfirmed by the authorities in Java. The royal center thus relied on archival documents from the peripheries to make its administrative decisions. Records continued to be dispersed as new decisions were inscribed on metal plates and sent back out to the far-flung provinces.

Another element of the dispersed archive was the rooting of historical memory in specific localities through physical monuments. The powerful effect of place on human memory has long been recognized. Renaissance Europeans made use of *loci memoriae* (memory places) to enhance their memorization techniques. The association between memory and place has been expansively developed in Pierre Nora's theory of *lieux de mémoire* (realms of memory).[57] In premodern Java, the modes of memory and writing could be combined to produce fixed monuments that communicated historical knowledge to those who visited them. The Batutulis inscription from Sunda in western Java declares itself as such a monument to the ancestry and deeds of a great king: "This is the monument [*sakakala*] of his Majesty the former king, inaugurated here with the name Prabu Guru Dewata; (and also) inaugurated here with the name Sri Baduga Maharaja, king of kings in Pakwan Pajajaran, Sri Sang Ratu Dewata. He is the one who demarcated Pakwan here, (being) the child of Rahyang Dewa Niskala, the one who

55. These are the Batur Pura Abang C (1384 CE), Tamblingan Pura Endek C (1384 CE), and Gobleg Pura Batur (1398 CE) inscriptions. Louis-Charles Damais, "Études d'épigraphie indonésienne: III. Liste des principales inscriptions datées de l'Indonésie," *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 46 (1952): 96–97; "Ouvrages d'études indonésiennes," *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 49 (1959): 693; I Gusti Made Suarbhawa, "Satu Lempeng Prasasti Tamblingan," *Forum Arkeologi* 23 (2010): 595–622.

56. "Praśastinikaṅ Her Abaṅ, anugraha saṅ atītabhupālaka, ṅkaneṅ Bali" (2v5) (Old Javanese). The text, which has never been published in full, is the subject of a forthcoming edition and translation by Wayan Jarrah Sastrawan (DHARMA).

57. Premodern Java, and more broadly the Austronesian-speaking peoples of Southeast Asia and the Pacific, offer a rich field for further research into this phenomenon. Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Routledge, 1999); Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, edited with a foreword by Lawrence D. Kritzman, translated by Arthur Goldhammer, 3 vols. (Columbia University Press, 1996–98).

vanished at Gunung Tiga; grandchild of Rahyang Niskala Wastu Kencana, the one who vanished to Nusa Larang. He, that one, produced the commemoration monument, artificial hill, cladded (it) with stone; he produced the ritual ground; he produced the holy colour lake."[58]

The term used here for monument, *sakakala*, has the additional meanings of "chronogram" and "record." Derived from a Sanskrit compound that simply means "Śaka era," the word underwent semantic shift: from a dated commemoration using the Śaka era to the more general notion of a historical monument. The word *sakakala* is inscribed on several such monuments.[59] The late fifteenth-century Old Sundanese poem *Bujangga Manik* illustrates how historical biographies were associated with memorial sites in the countryside. During the protagonist's journey across Java, he encounters monuments to figures of the past: Cupak (697), Silih Wangi (732), the deity of Mount Karungrungan (771), Darmadewa (775), Sang Kuriang (1342), and Patanjala (1366).[60] For some of these sites, the poem briefly mentions a biographical story associated with the memorialized person. The form and purpose of these monuments are elaborated in the protagonist's own construction of a memorial to himself: "I then raised a *liṅga*, I then made a statue, then made a monument [*sakakala*]. This shows everyone, shows for posterity, that I was on the way to completing my task."[61] These monuments served as repositories of historical knowledge, especially regarding the lives of prominent people. They were not gathered in one place but were scattered throughout the length

58. "Ini sakakala, prəbu ratu purāna pun, ḍivastu ḍyi, viṅaran Prəbu Guru Devata pran ḍivastu ḍyə ḍiṅaran Sri Baduga Maharaja, ratu haji ḍi Pakvan Pajajaran sri saṅ ratu ḍevata pun ya nu ñusuk na Pakvan ḍyə anak Rahyiṅ Deva Niskala, saṅ siḍa mokta ḍi Gunuṅ Tiga qəṅcu Rahyiṅ Niskala Vastu Kañcana, saṅ siḍa mokta ka Nusa Laraṅ, ya syi nu ñyin sakakala gugunuṅan, ṅabalay ñyin samiḍa ñyin saṅ hyiṅ talaga varna" (1–8) (Old Sundanese). Quoted from the edition and English translation given, along with a pertinent discussion of the meaning of *sakakala*, in Aditia Gunawan and Arlo Griffiths, "Old Sundanese Inscriptions," 148–52.

59. The term appears in several thirteenth- to fifteenth-century inscriptions from western Java to Bali, including Wurare (1289 CE), Karanglo (circa fourteenth century CE), Gunung Nyamil (1328–1329 CE), Batutulis (uncertain date, either 1333–34 or 1533–34 CE), Panulisan V (1342 CE), Mojojejer (1392–93 CE), Linggawani/Rumatak (1411–12 CE), and Kebantenan I (no date, circa fifteenth century CE).

60. These monuments are discussed further in Alex West's commentary on the *Bujangga Manik*. The lines references given here follow West's revised line numbering. West, *Bujangga Manik*, 197–214.

61. Tehering na[ñ]jerken li[ng]ga | tehering ñi[y]an hareca | teher ñi[y]an sakakala | ini tu[ñ]juken sakalih | tu[ñ]juken nu ka pa[n]deri | maring aing pa[n]tég hañca" (1286–91) (Old Sundanese). West, *Bujangga Manik*, 176–77.

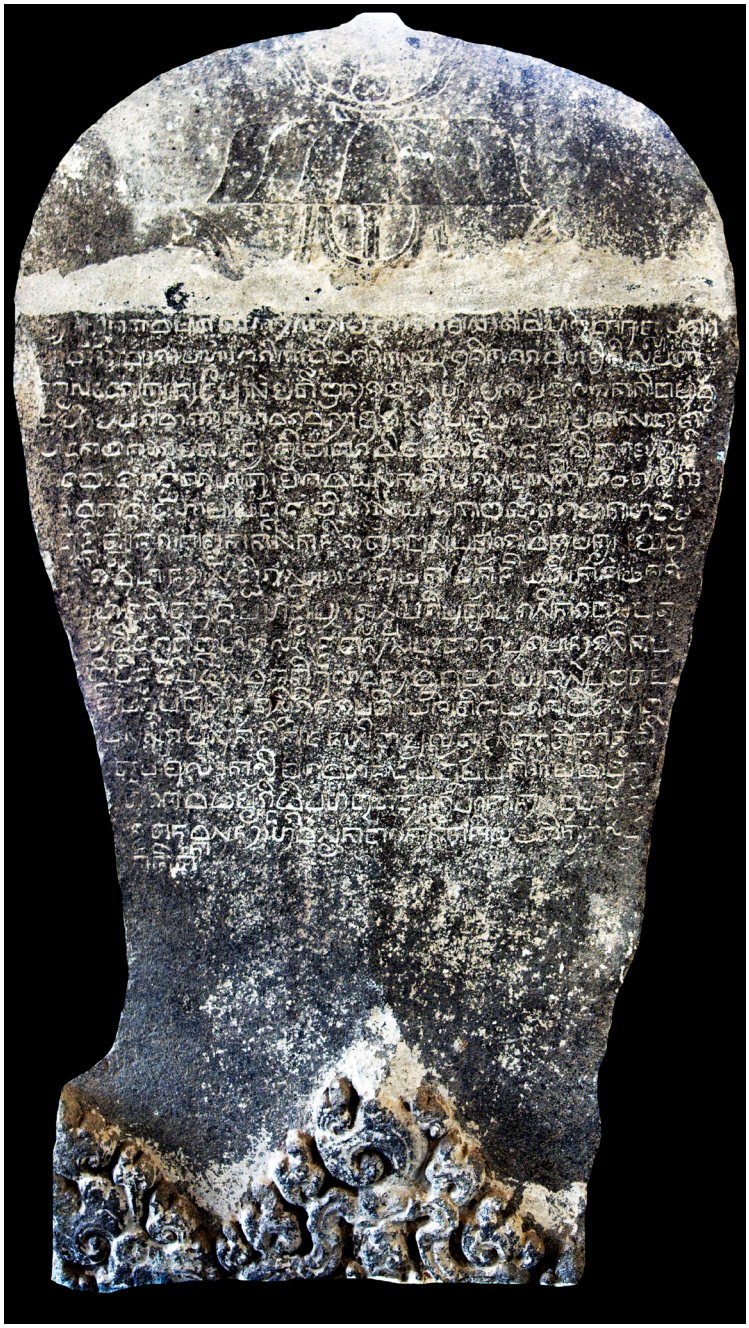


FIGURE 9. Śilāmaṇikuṇḍala stone inscription commemorating the building of a dam (issued 1350 CE). Airlangga Museum, Kediri, eastern Java, inventory number 134/KDR/96. Photograph by Adeline Levivier (2023). CC 4.0.

and breadth of the island. As a result, physical journeys were an indispensable means for people in Java to learn about their past.[62]

Besides the written text inscribed on a monument, historical knowledge could also be conveyed through oral-mnemonic traditions tied to that monument's location. The link between place and historical tradition is brought about through the narrative device of topogeny, which involves the listing of place names in oral and written texts.[63] Topogenies are found throughout the world, being especially important among Malayo-Polynesian language communities, such as the Māori of Aotearoa New Zealand.[64] Theoretical attention to topogeny emphasizes the oral roots of the intimate connection between histories and sites, as encountered in the diverse cultures of the archipelago.[65] This close association between place and the memorialization of the past illustrates the geographical dispersal of historical knowledge.

There is some evidence for how people in premodern Java used such locative monuments to learn about the past. The *Deśavarṇana* gives more concrete examples of the localization of historical knowledge. Cantos 38–49 of the poem describe how the narrator, Prapañca, visited a senior cleric called Ratnāṁśa at a monastery in Mungguh in eastern Java. Prapañca's explicit purpose was to obtain historical information: "My aim in coming here is

62. The practice of traveling around the countryside to learn about the past by visiting local monuments is thematized, not only in premodern texts like the *Deśavarṇana* and *Bujangga Manik* but also in the early modern Javanese *Jatiswara* and *Centhini*. Tim E. Behrend, "The Serat Jatiswara: Structure and Change in a Javanese Poem, 1600–1930" (PhD diss., Australian National University, 1987); Soewito Santoso, *The Centhini Story: The Javanese Story of Life* (Marshall Cavendish, 2006).

63. The term "topogeny" was coined by Jim Fox in the context of oral narratives in the eastern Indonesian island of Rote. It has been adapted in other Indonesian contexts such as the Old Sundanese poem *Bujangga Manik*. James J. Fox, "Genealogy and Topogeny: Towards an Ethnography of Rotinese Ritual Place Names," in *The Poetic Power of Place: Comparative Perspectives on Austronesian Ideas of Locality*, edited by James J. Fox (ANU EPress, 1997), 89; Alexander J. West, "Bujangga Manik: An Old Sundanese topogeny?" (master's thesis, Leiden University, 2017), 35–37.

64. Topogenies show remarkable similarities to "mind maps" of precolonial Māori communities. Mere Roberts, "Mind Maps of the Māori," *GeoJournal* 77 (2012): 741–51; David James Murphy, "Māori Orality and Extended Cognition: A Cognitive Approach to Memory and Oral Tradition in Pacific" (PhD diss., Victoria University of Wellington, 2015), 84–137.

65. Similar to the notion of topogeny, the analytical concept of "historyscapes," defined as a method for studying historical and geographical perceptions of a region in conjunction with each other, highlights the centrality of place in the oral-historical practices of the eastern Indonesian islands of Alor and Rote. Emilie Wellfelt, "Historyscapes in Alor: Approaching Indigenous Histories in Eastern Indonesia" (PhD diss., Linnaeus University, 2016), 15–16.

a desire to ask about the deeds of ancestors."[66] The ancestors in question were the thirteenth-century kings whose funerary shrines were located in nearby districts, described in Cantos 36 and 37. This suggests that historical knowledge concerning the royal dynasty was highly localized, being tied to the worship of deceased monarchs who were "the descendants and the incarnations of gods" at permanent shrines throughout the countryside.[67] The fact that Prapañca consulted a local informant suggests that such knowledge may not have been readily available to him in the royal capital where he lived. The dispersal of historical knowledge thus applied to all modes, not only written records on stone and metal, but also to oral-mnemonic traditions linked to physical monuments and buildings.

ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR RECORDS

Historical records are profoundly shaped by the social organizations that produce, maintain, and consult them. Institutional factors determine the sorts of historical evidence that are available to study the past. The emergence and abeyance of standardized formats of record give insight into the history of the organizations that used them. Information that is irrelevant to these organizations tends to go unrecorded, so it cannot be recovered by historical study unless it happens to survive through other modes. The question of recordkeeping is therefore central to any cross-cultural study of historical practice. To deeply understand a place's history, we would do well to examine its panoply of recordkeeping practices, with all their various motivations, textual formats, and social uses.

Recordkeeping is intimately tied to the development and maintenance of social organizations. When those organizations are disrupted or replaced, their records lose relevance. They cease to be produced, maintained, and consulted, which leads to a fragmentation of the historical evidence available to future generations. This process is starkly illustrated in Java during the sixteenth century, which saw major transformations of the island's culture and society. In the early decades of the sixteenth century, the Hindu and Buddhist royal courts lost their dominance to a loose-knit coalition of coastal

66. "Don ra kavi n parāhyun atañā karmani tuha-tuhā" (38.6a) (Old Javanese). Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th Century*, 1:28.

67. "Devavaṁśāthavā devamūrti" (49.5d) (Old Javanese). Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th Century*, 1:36.

principalities ruled by Muslims. The political upheaval caused unprecedented disruption to organizations that depended on Hindu and Buddhist patronage, such as monasteries, temples, and endowed foundations.

This social disruption caused severe discontinuities in the historical record of Java. An important example of the break in recordkeeping was the cessation of tax grants being issued on stone and metal. Such grants continued to be issued well into the late fifteenth century but then ceased abruptly. In 1486 CE, five inscriptions by a king of Majapahit were issued on stone to confirm the grants of previous monarchs over a piece of land near the royal capital.[68] These late inscriptions largely conform to the standard format and wording of royal tax grants over the preceding seven centuries. But they are the last of their kind—their production seems to have ended with the fall of the Majapahit court in the subsequent years. The close of the fifteenth century also marks the end of the production of the other types of record discussed above. The latest surviving royal panegyric is the Waringin Pitu inscription (1447 CE), which maintains a high standard of Sanskrit poetic composition and largely conforms to genre expectations, though with some unusual features.[69] Thereafter, inscriptions of this type were no longer produced in Java. The same goes for the legal rulings and short decree inscriptions, of which no examples are known from the sixteenth century.

The reason for the break in the historical record was the dissolution of the social organizations that needed to make and use these records: the royal courts that supported the Hindu and Buddhist foundations, the agricultural estates governed by benefice regulations, and the judicial system that managed property rights and litigation. As these organizations broke down, their records became less accessible. There is scant evidence from the sixteenth century of the vibrant culture of consulting archival documents that we find in fourteenth-century Java, as described in the *Deśavarṇana* and as exemplified by the vigorous reissuing of inscriptions in that period. This was not because people in Java had suddenly lost interest in their own history. Texts compiled around the beginning of the sixteenth century show that writers

68. These are the Sidotopo, Petak, and Trailokyapuri I, II, and III inscriptions. Brandes, *Oud-Javaansche Oorkonden*, 212–26; Muhammad Yamin, *Tatanegara Madjapahit*, 7 vols. (Jajasan Prapantja, 1962–1964), 2:233–56; Hasan Djafar, *Masa akhir Majapahit: Girindrawardhana dan masalahnya* (Komunitas Bambu, 2009).

69. Noorduyn, "Majapahit in the Fifteenth Century." A new edition and translation of the Waringin Pitu inscription has been prepared by Arlo Griffiths and Marine Schoettel (DHARMA).

continued to pay close attention to stories about the past, wherever and in whatever form they could be found.[70] But the kinds of administrative record discussed in this chapter, inscribed on stone and metal, played hardly any role in the new historical writing.

This final consideration ties back to the book's theme of precarity. Records must be accessible if they are to be used as historical evidence. Access to evidence can be constrained by the perishability of records, the geographical dispersal of archives, and the fragility of the organizations that care for them. The historical record of premodern communities is often dispersed and vulnerable to loss, while their social organizations have suffered disruption and displacement, especially in colonized parts of the world. Therefore, we cannot assume that historians in premodern times used evidence as we would ideally like them to have done. When appraising the methods employed by historians of the past, we must always consider the limitations of their access to records. This is particularly important when historical works apparently fail to draw on relevant sources or do not clearly acknowledge the sources they do use. As we will see, this happened in premodern Java. By understanding how widely the habits and circumstances of recordkeeping vary from place to place, we can avoid prematurely dismissing such practices as unhistorical. Instead, we can more genuinely engage with them as revealing examples of the global diversity of historical practices.

70. Early sixteenth-century texts of this kind include the *Pararaton*, the *Tantu Panggelaran*, and the *Siksa Kandang Karesian*.

THREE

Counting the Years

HISTORICAL PRACTICES ARE SHAPED not only by the material and social conditions discussed in the previous chapters but also by the textual genres that people use. Genres encourage specific choices for studying evidence of the past and expressing knowledge of history. They prescribe the forms and influence the content of historical works. The matter of history is not independent of the manner of telling it—form and content are intimately related. To understand why people throughout the world practice history in different ways, we need to consider the genres of historical writing that are available to them. This chapter and the next examine two historiographical genres that were significant in premodern Java: annals and heroic biographies. Through this examination, the chapters illustrate how choices of genre influence the many ways that people on the island engaged with their past.

This chapter focuses on annals, a widespread genre of historiography in the premodern world. Annals consist of a series of entries, ordered by calendar date, each containing a discrete segment of historical information. This genre emerged independently in many societies. The earliest surviving annals texts were written in Mesopotamia during the early centuries of the second millennium BCE.[1] The Chinese classic *Springs and Autumns* (Chūn qiū) is the oldest extant annals in that language, probably compiled in the fifth century BCE as the official chronicle of the Lǔ state.[2] Annals were the predominant historiographical genre in Latin Christendom at the turn

1. Piotr Michalowski, "Early Mesopotamia," in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, vol. 1, *Beginnings to AD 600* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 21–22.

2. Stephen Durrant, "Histories (*shi* 史)," *The Oxford Handbook of Classical Chinese Literature*, edited by Wiebke Denecke, Wai-Yee Li, and Xiaofei Tian (Oxford University Press, 2017), 186.

of the second millennium CE, and they first appeared in Java around the same time.[3] The independent invention of annals in different parts of the world invites us to ask, What does this genre offer to historians, and how does its adoption shape historical practices?

This chapter investigates the temporal structures of annals texts, their political concerns, and their capacity to accommodate diverse and sometimes conflicting source material. The first section examines the conditions for the emergence of annals in various societies. Annals build on preexisting systems for keeping time and counting years as they pass. A concern for political leadership is a common feature of the annals genre in many traditions. The second section considers how annals are compiled and put together, through a detailed study of the oldest surviving annals text in manuscript form from premodern Java, a fourteenth-century court chronicle called the *Deśavarṇana*. The third section considers how annals can be interpreted as conglomerate texts in which heterogeneous source material is compiled without being made uniform and consistent. The sixteenth-century annals text *Pararaton* shows how the annals genre can provide a flexible way for historians to synthesize fragmented evidence. However, it can also lead to problems of interpretation, as contextual knowledge is lost over the centuries.

THE ANNALS GENRE

Annals prescribe specific methods for organizing historical knowledge. They generate a linear temporality whereby historical events can be precisely situated on a timeline. In annals, every event happens before, after, or at the same time as every other. Annals can accommodate diverse content, as long as the text is divided into dated segments. Annals usually lack a single narratorial voice. Instead, they often present historical information in what seem to be plain statements of fact without explanation or analysis. Annals can be easily compiled, excerpted, interpolated, and recombined with each other. The genre is therefore especially suited to synthesizing fragmentary and heterogeneous information about the past. Deciding what content to include and to exclude in a compilation can be a highly political choice, but the annalists rarely make this process transparent to the reader.

3. Woolf, *Global History of History*, 114–16.

In post-Renaissance Europe, annals have often been considered an unsophisticated genre of historical writing.[4] The historical theorist Hayden White argued that scholars have "distinguished between the annals, chronicle, and history forms of discourse on the basis of their attainment of narrative fullness or failure to attain it."[5] Annals have been belittled because their sole organizing principle is a calendar system, so they seem to lack the cohesion and coherence of true narrative. White himself had earlier described annals as one of the "primitive elements" of historical accounts.[6] But in recent years, scholarship has moved toward a greater appreciation of the annals genre. Annals are increasingly recognized as having their own rhetorical and explanatory techniques, distinct from those of thematically or narratively organized histories.[7] They exhibit their own intricacies, due to the multiplicity of their authorship, their mixed transmission, and the variety of their source material.[8] As such, annals are worthy of sustained and in-depth analysis.

The annals genre emerged in different societies at different times, but it shares similar forms and features across these contexts. Early annals texts build on preexisting systems of timekeeping and are often associated with political leaders. One of the oldest examples is the royal annals text of the Old Hittite king Hattusili I in the seventeenth century BCE, which describes the feats of this king in five entries dated to specific years of his reign.[9] This method of counting the years of a monarch's reign is very common in annals throughout the world.[10] The intimate connection between the

4. This contrasts with the very high esteem in which annals have always been held in China. Grant Hardy, "Can an Ancient Chinese Historian Contribute to Modern Western Theory? The Multiple Narratives of Ssu-Ma Ch'ien," *History and Theory* 33 (1994): 24n9.

5. White, *Content of the Form*, 24.

6. White, *Metahistory*, 5–6.

7. Sarah Foot, "Finding the Meaning of the Form: Narrative in Annals and Chronicles," in *Writing Medieval History*, edited by Nancy Partner (Bloomsbury, 2005), 88–108.

8. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle(s)* provide a good case study of such textual complexity. Alice Jorgensen, ed., *Reading the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: Language, Literature, History* (Brepols, 2010); Pauline Stafford, *After Alfred: Anglo-Saxon Chronicles and Chroniclers, 900–1150* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

9. Gary Beckman, "The Annals of Hattusili I," in *The Ancient Near East*, edited by M. W. Chavalas (Oxford University Press, 2006), 219–22; Trevor R. Bryce, "The Annals and Lost Golden Statue of the Hittite King Hattusili I," *Gephyra* 16 (2018): 1–12.

10. Regnal years are a special type of era, since counting the years from the beginning of a monarch's reign is formally identical to defining an epoch of a linear count of years. For example, regnal years are common in South Asian inscriptions and in the Chinese "veritable records" (*shílù* 實錄) genre of imperial historiography. Richard Salomon, *Indian Epigraphy:*

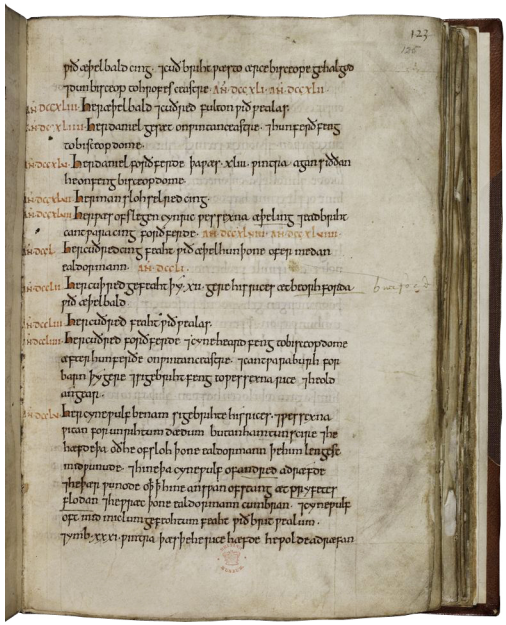


FIGURE 10. Manuscript C of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle(s)* (copied eleventh century CE). British Library Cotton MS Tiberius B I, f. 125r. Public domain.

annals format and political leadership distinguishes it from other kinds of historical record, such as the litigation documents of premodern Java discussed in the previous chapter, which place greater emphasis on people other than the ruler.

The annals genre presupposes a system for assigning dates to passages of text. A complete date is generated by two separate timekeeping devices used in conjunction: a calendar, which defines and labels intervals within a temporal cycle, and an era, which counts these cycles in a linear order.[11] An example of a calendar is the seven-day week labeled Monday to Sunday, while an example of an era is the Hijri era, which counts the years since the emigration of the prophet Muhammad from Mecca. The era is the essential organizing principle of all annals texts. To form an ordered sequence, all

A Guide to the Study of Inscriptions in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and the Other Indo-Aryan Languages (Oxford University Press, 1998), 171–72; Durrant, "Histories," 185.

11. Wayan Jarrah Sastrawan, "Temporalities in Southeast Asian Historiography," *History and Theory* 59 (2020): 216.

annals entries must be dated relative to at least one era.[12] Defining an era involves the fixing of a unique epoch, which is usually a moment of major historical significance: the accession of a monarch, the founding of a city, or the birth of a prophet.[13]

The development of the annals genre in premodern Java provides an instructive case study of the genre's relationship with timekeeping and political power. Two timekeeping devices, both originating in Sanskrit traditions, underpin the island's earliest annals texts: the Śaka era and the chronogram device. The Śaka era, whose epoch was on April 1, 78 CE, was in widespread use throughout South and Southeast Asia from the middle of the first millennium CE onward. The origins of the Śaka era are unclear, though its name suggests that it may have originated as a regnal era of one of the Śaka kings of western India.[14] Chronograms are a temporal device for encoding the digits of a year numeral as a series of symbols, which emerged independently in many Eurasian cultures. It was the Sanskrit chronogram system that was adopted and elaborated throughout Southeast Asia.[15] Its first recorded use in Java is in the eighth-century Canggal inscription, whose year of issue is 654

12. Some annals use multiple eras concurrently, such as the twelfth-century *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, by Kalhaṇa, which combines the Śaka, Kali, and Laukika eras. In these cases, the same events can be dated with reference to different era and calendar systems. These situations also carry the risk of redundancy and inconsistency if the dates of one era are not correctly synchronized with those of another. M. A. Stein, ed. and trans., *Kalhaṇa's Rājataraṅgiṇī: A Chronicle of the Kings of Kaśmīr*, 2 vols. (Archibald Constable, 1900), 134–38; Shonaleeka Kaul, "'Seeing' the Past: Text and Questions of History in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*," *History and Theory* 53 (2014): 194–211.

13. The dichotomy between calendar and era is somewhat complicated by the long count system of the Maya. This system of five nested cycles is formally a calendar with a natural zero point, represented as 13.0.0.0.0. This moment effectively serves as an epoch for a linear sequence of thirteen *baktuns* (the largest cycle of the standard Long Count system lasting 144,000 days). Maya texts describe this zero point as a foundational moment of creation represented by the ritual act of raising monumental stones. Speculative expansions of the system through the creation of increasingly higher-order cycles, called the Grand Long Count by modern scholars, added a cosmological dimension to a historically rooted system of dating. David Stuart, "Maya Time," in *The Maya World*, edited by Scott R. Hutson and Traci Ardern (Routledge, 2020), 624–47.

14. Salomon, *Indian Epigraphy*, 182–84; Bill M. Mak, "The Date and Nature of Sphujidhvaja's *Yavanajātaka* Reconsidered in the Light of Some Newly Discovered Materials," *History of Science in South Asia* 1 (2013): 1–20.

15. The *bhūtasaṁkhya* (thing-numeral) system of word-numeral correspondences is found in texts as old as the *Chandaḥsūtra*, a prosodic manual of the second century BCE or earlier. Sreeramula Rajeswara Sarma, "On the Rationale of the Maxim *Aṅkānaṃ Vāmato Gatiḥ*," *Gaṇita Bhāratī* 31 (2009): 2.

Śaka, equivalent to 732 CE.[16] The Śaka year 654 is expressed as the series of symbols—"scriptures–senses–feelings" (*śruti–indriya–rasa*)—that encode the digits in reverse order: *śruti* = 4, *indriya* = 5, *rasa* = 6. Such chronograms became the predominant means of dating annals entries in Java, becoming assimilated into the Javanese language and remaining in use up to the present day.[17]

The oldest surviving examples of annals texts in Java are found in inscriptions issued by kings. These annals provide historical information as background to the inscription's main purpose. The Wanua Tengah III inscription (908 CE) from central Java provides an elaborate example of how annals were integrated into preexisting epigraphical genres. This inscription is a tax grant which allocates the agricultural produce of the village of Wanua Tengah for the benefit of a local Buddhist monastery. Unusually for this kind of record, it begins with an annals text describing how royal favor toward the monastery waxed and waned over a period of one and a half centuries; this prologue takes up over a third of the inscribed surface of the inscription.

In the Wanua Tengah III inscription, the accession of each king is given its own dated entry, making it an invaluable source for the dynastic history of eighth- and ninth-century Java.[18] The original benefice, created during the reign of the Lord of Panangkaran as king (746–784 CE), was repeatedly

16. The Sanskrit text of the Canggal inscription is quoted from H. B. Sarkar, *Corpus of the Inscriptions of Java (Corpus Inscriptionum Javanicarum), up to 928 A.D.*, 2 vols. (K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1971–72), 1:17.

17. This practice continued well after Islam had become the predominant religion in Java. Even after the adoption of the Islamic lunar calendar by the Central Javanese royal court in 1633 CE, most people in Java continued to count years in their local version of the Śaka era (sometimes called *Anno Javanico* by Western scholars), rather than switching to the standard Islamic Hijri era. M. C. Ricklefs, *Modern Javanese Historical Tradition: A Study of an Original Kartasura Chronicle and Related Materials* (School of Oriental and African Studies, 1978), 232–33; J. Noorduyn, "Some Remarks on Javanese Chronogram Words: A Case of Localization," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 149 (1993): 298–317; E. P. Wieringa, "A Monument Marking the Dawn of the Muslim Era in Java: Chronicles and Chronograms on the Grand Mosque of Demak," in *Figurations of Time in Asia*, edited by Dietrich Boschung and Corinna Wessels-Mevissen, Morphomata 4 (Wilhelm Fink, 2012), 157–92.

18. Boechari, *Melacak Sejarah Indonesia Lewat Prasasti*, 467–71; Jan Wisseman Christie, "Revisiting Early Mataram," in *Fruits of Inspiration: Studies in Honour of Prof. J. G. de Casparis*, edited by M. J. Klokke and K. R. van Kooij (Forsten, 2001), 25–55; J. Sundberg, "Appendix A—The State of Matarām: A Review of Recent Efforts to Clarify Its History," in *Caṇḍi Mendut: Womb of the Tathāgata*, edited by M. Long, Śata-Piṭaka Series 632 (Aditya Prakashan, 2009), 329–362.

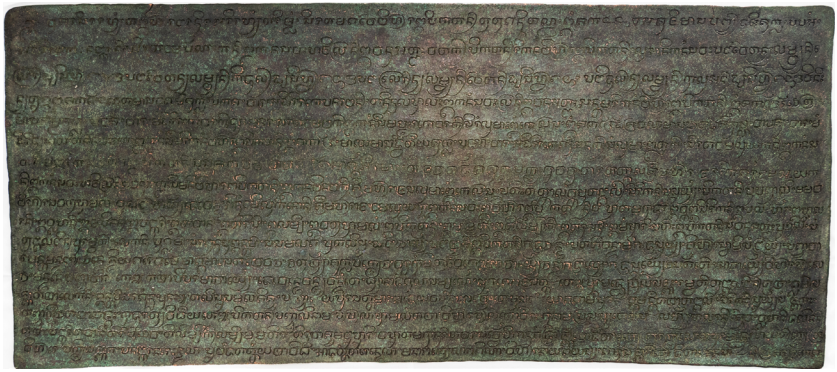


FIGURE 11. Wanua Tengah III inscription from central Java (issued 908 CE). Badan Pelestarian Kebudayaan (Cultural Preservation Office) Region X, Prambanan, central Java, inventory number 1118–1119, plate IV. Photo by Adeline Levivier (2023). CC 4.0.

revoked and restored by subsequent rulers over the ninth century. Key events mentioned in these annals include the first revocation of the monastery's privilege by King Manara sometime during his reign (803–27 CE), its first restoration by the Lord of Garung in 829 CE, its second revocation by King Saladu during his reign (847–55 CE), and its second restoration by King Balitung in 908 CE.

Each entry in the Wanua Tengah III inscription is dated in years of the Śaka era, which are expressed as numerals rather than as chronograms. The day is specified by two calendar systems used in conjunction: the Indic lunisolar calendar and the Javanese weekday cycles.[19] For the sake of illustration, the entries for 847 CE and 887 CE (given in the text as 768 and 808 of the Śaka era) are as follows:

> In Śaka 768, the month Phālguna, the first day of the waning fortnight, the solar day Paniruan Kaliwon Āditya [March 6, 847 CE], the Lord of Pikatan, *dyah* Saladu, was established [on the throne]. He dissolved the benefice [*sīma*] for a second time. The Lord of Pikatan died.[20]

> In Śaka 808, the month Magha, the fifth day of the waning fortnight, the solar day Tungle Pahing Bṛhaspati [January 18, 887 CE], the Lord of Gurunbangi, *dyah* Bhadra, was established [on the throne]. Thereupon the Lord of Gurunbangi fled, in the month Phālguna, on the

19. Casparis, *Indonesian Chronology*, 2–9.

20. "Iṅ Śaka 768 Phālgunamāsa pratipāda kṛṣṇa, Pa Ka Ā, vāra, maṅḍiri rake Pikatan dyah Salaḍū, sira kapiṇḍuaniṅ lumabur ikana sīma, pəjah rake Pikatan" (2r.1) (Old Javanese).

second day of the waning fortnight [February 14, 887 CE]. The country was leaderless at that time.[21]

The Wanua Tengah III inscription describes political events relevant to the monastery, spanning the mid-eighth to the early tenth century CE. This tax grant (dated 908 CE) explicitly draws on an earlier record (dated 829 CE) that had been issued by the Lord of Garung when he restored the benefice. The inscription quotes the Garung charter in both Sanskrit and Old Javanese versions. Immediately after the end of the quotation, the 908 CE text states: "Such was the charter of the Lord of Garung, by which he restored these rice fields to the monastery at Pikatan."[22] The content of the Garung charter is clearly demarcated from the content of Wanua Tengah III proper, creating an explicit distinction between old and new material in the text. This method of quotation illustrates the capacity of the annals format to incorporate diverse kinds of preexisting material. It also suggests that states in tenth-century Java maintained dated records of historical events going back over a century, which they could draw on to create annals texts and to contextualize legal decisions.

These features of the annals genre, especially its focus on royal power, are grandly illustrated in the Pucangan inscription (1041 CE) issued by King Airlangga, who ruled in eastern Java (1020–1052 CE). This is a bilingual text containing Sanskrit verse on one side and Old Javanese prose on the other. Each side gives an annalistic account of the major events of Airlangga's life up to 1041 CE and the circumstances that led him to become a powerful king. The inscription combines two epigraphical genres discussed in the previous chapter, royal panegyric and tax grant, while including annals entries using the Śaka era together with the Indic lunisolar calendar. The annals on the Sanskrit side are expressed in chronograms and in verse; they form part of the royal panegyric of Airlangga and exhibit a highly skilled application of *kāvya* poetic techniques. The annals on the Javanese side are expressed in numerals and in prose, appearing as part of the historical background of the tax grant. The annals entries of the Pucangan inscription are summarized in table 1, with the Sanskrit and Javanese data merged into a single

21. "I Śaka 808 Māghamāsa, pañcami kr̥ṣṇa, Vā Po Bu, vāra, maṅḍiri rake Gurunbaṅi dyah Bhadra, miṅgat rake Gurunbaṅi, irikanaṅ samaṅkanātah Phālguṅamāsa, dvitīya kr̥ṣṇapakṣa, anāyaka ikanaṅ rāt rikaṅ kāla" (2r.3–4) (Old Javanese).

22. "Nahan praśasti rakai Garuṅ ar uvahakən ikanaṅ savah iṅ bihāra i Pikatan" (1v.17–2r.1) (Old Javanese).

TABLE 1 Annals entries in the Pucangan inscription

Date (CE)	Event
Early 1017	The king of Wurawari attacks Dharmavaṁśa's palace
March 2–30, 1017	The former king dies and is enshrined at the sanctuary at Wwatan
January 11, 1020	Airlangga's followers declare him king and ask him to take control of the land
February 16, 1030 / March 3, 1030[a]	Airlangga defeats a king called Viṣṇuprabhava
1030	Airlangga faces King Paruda of Wengker, driving him out of his palace
1031	Airlangga pursues and kills the son of the King of Wengker
1032	Airlangga defeats a powerful woman associated with the regions Langding Rak and Ireng-irengan
September 3, 1035	Airlangga moves his army west and defeats king Vijaya at his palace at Kapang
October 20, 1037	King Vijaya is captured by his own troops
November 10, 1037	Airlangga takes the throne and Java is at peace

[a]The reading for the half of the month is unclear. If we read "waxing," then the date is equivalent to February 16; if we read "waning," then it is equivalent to March 3.

timeline converted to CE dates.[23] This narrative was most likely drawn from a preexisting historical record, just like the administrative changes reported in the Wanua Tengah III charter. The use of complete dates for many but not all entries suggests that the annals text may have been compiled using information from different sources. Unlike the Wanua Tengah III inscription, however, the Pucangan inscription does not mention the sources it may have drawn on.

The Wanua Tengah III and Pucangan inscriptions are unusual in the Old Javanese epigraphical corpus; most inscriptions do not contain such annalistic portions. Annals did not constitute a stand-alone genre for inscriptions in the same way that tax grants and royal panegyrics did in premodern Java.

23. See the forthcoming edition and translation of this inscription by Czaba Dezső and Arlo Griffiths. The text was previously published by Hendrik Kern in 1917. Czaba Dezső and Arlo Griffiths, "The Pucangan Inscription of Airlangga, King of Java" (DHARMA); H. Kern, "De steen van den berg Pĕnanggungan (Surabaya), thans in 't Indian Museum te Calcutta, met Sanskrit-inscriptie en Oudjavaansche inscriptie van 963 Çāka, ter eere van vorst Er-Langga," *Verspreide geschriften*, 17 vols. (Martinus Nijhoff, 1917), 7:83–114.

However, the elaborate form and substantial content of the annals in these two inscriptions suggests that they drew on a preexisting tradition of annals writing that has since been lost. Through the internal evidence of the annals texts that survive as manuscripts, we can infer the existence of many more such texts that have not survived to the present day. The annals in manuscript form exhibit the characteristic features shared by the Wanua Tengah III and Pucangan inscriptions, and of the annals genre worldwide: an ordered series of dated entries, a focus on political leadership, and a capacity to accommodate a diverse range of source material.

COMPOSING ANNALS

Annals texts throughout the world mostly exist in manuscript form, rather than as durable inscriptions. The Old English annals tradition, for example, is found only in a handful of parchment manuscripts dating from the tenth to the twelfth century.[24] Manuscript annals were not written in isolation from each other but were produced within coherent traditions of historical writing. The existence of such traditions can be inferred from the form and content of the surviving manuscripts; similarities and differences between the extant texts often point to the influence of older, now-lost source texts. Only two annals texts from Java written before 1600 CE have survived to the present day: the *Deśavarṇana*, composed in the mid-fourteenth century, and the *Pararaton*, compiled in the early sixteenth century from older sources. Both were originally written in Java, but they were subsequently transmitted only in the manuscript tradition of Bali. From these two surviving works, it is possible to infer the existence of a full-fledged annals tradition in premodern Java.

The *Deśavarṇana* (Description of districts) was composed in 1365 CE by an official at the royal court at Majapahit in eastern Java, who used the pen-name Prapañca (bewildered): "In the Śaka [year] mountains–elephants–suns [1287], in the month Āśvayuja, at the auspicious moment of the full moon [that is, September 30, 1365 CE]—that was when the poet concluded his description of the king's supremacy in the realm. A large number of districts have been detailed, with the intention of including them in a book, to be

24. Stafford, *After Alfred*, 36.

called the *Description of Districts*."[25] The *Deśavarṇana* is a *kakawin* poem, namely, a verse narrative in quantitative meters and in the Old Javanese language.[26] The *kakawin* genre of poetry, which usually took for its subject matter stories from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* epic traditions, flourished from the tenth to the fifteenth century in Java and from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century in Bali. The *Deśavarṇana* provides detailed descriptions of courtly life in fourteenth-century Java, with praise of the reigning king and members of the royal family, summaries of recent history, descriptions of the palace, and accounts of various journeys to the Javanese countryside. Unusually for Old Javanese poetry, the author of the *Deśavarṇana* includes himself as a character in the story. Prapañca is thus a penname that disguises the personal identity of this narrator-character, who was most likely a real person living in the Majapahit royal court.[27]

The *Deśavarṇana* embeds its descriptive passages within a chronological framework. Its content is divided into dated entries about historical events relevant to the Majapahit royal court, interspersed with observations of contemporary life. These annals entries are dated using chronograms in the Śaka era, sometimes with additional calendrical information specifying the month or even the day. Political leadership is the prominent theme. The poem is

25. "Riṅśākādri gajāryamāśvayujamāsa śubhadivaśa pūrṇacandrama | ṅkā hīṅan ra kavi n pamarṇana kadigvijayanira narendra riṅ prajā | kvehniṅ deśa riniñci donika pinustaka mañarana Deśavarṇana" (94.2a–c) (Old Javanese). Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th Century*, 73.

26. This text is also known by the alternative title *Nagarakṛtāgama*, which was invented by an eighteenth-century Balinese scribe. *Deśavarṇana* is the older and more authentic title, which is why it is preferred here. The text is cited from the published edition of the Cakranagara manuscript by Th. Pigeaud in the first volume of *Java in the 14th Century*, occasionally supplemented with readings from the Amlapura manuscript from an unpublished transliteration made by Dewa Gde Catra in 1984. Stuart O. Robson, *Deśawarṇana (Nagarakṛtāgama) by Mpu Prapañca*, Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde 169 (KITLV Press, 1995), 1; Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th Century*, 1:1–77. Zoetmulder, *Kalangwan*; Helen Creese, *Women of the Kakawin World: Marriage and Sexuality in the Indic Courts of Java and Bali* (M. E. Sharpe, 2004).

27. It is possible to glean some vague hints about Prapañca's life from brief autobiographical comments in the poem, which have generated considerable differences of interpretation among modern scholars. Prapañca had some kind of relationship with the superintendent of Buddhist affairs, whom he mentions in the context of joining a royal procession through the countryside in 1359 CE. The exact nature of this relationship, or indeed whether Prapañca was himself the superintendent, is still debated by specialists. For a summary of this debate, see Zoetmulder, *Kalangwan*, 356; Robson, *Deśawarṇana*, 108; Peter Worsley, "Fact or Fiction? Magical Realism and Mpu Prapañca's Fourteenth-Century Deśawarṇana," Paper presented at the AA-Ken Forum, July 9, 2015, 4–10.

explicitly dedicated to the reigning king of Majapahit, and it pays close attention to court matters in the manner of a royal panegyric. The king and his family, including both its living members and their deceased ancestors, are described in idealized terms. At the poem's conclusion, Prapañca states that the sole purpose of his work is to glorify and consolidate the king's power: "Only to be a praise poem at the feet of the Lord Girinātha—may it be well received! None other than a petition for the welfare of the world, especially the firm establishment of the king in the realm."[28] The political concern of Prapañca's annals text is further reinforced by his use of the techniques of Sanskrit praise poems.[29] The *Deśavarṇana* thus compels us to rethink the stereotype of annals as mere lists of facts without narrative shape or ideological persuasion.

The *Deśavarṇana* seems to be a single coherent composition by an individual author, as is typical of the *kakawin* genre to which it belongs. However, there are some indications that Prapañca compiled the text in multiple rounds and drew on a variety of source materials in doing so. The work is organized as a single list of annals in which shorter sub-lists are nested—a chronological structure that has escaped many scholars' attention. There is a main list of entries in chronological order spanning the whole poem, dealing with events between 1334 and 1365 CE of which Prapañca had first-hand knowledge (table 2).

Some of the annals entries in the main list contain within them sub-lists pertaining to other periods. These sub-lists contain information about the more distant past that Prapañca learned from others, rather than events he personally observed. The most significant of these is the dynastic history sub-list (cantos 39–49), which Prapañca embeds within the 1359 CE entry describing his journey to the eastern part of the kingdom. The sub-list is presented as the direct speech of Ratnāṁśa, an elderly Buddhist cleric whom Prapañca asks about the king's ancestors. Ratnāṁśa delivers his response in the form of a series of chronogram entries, which are summarized in table 3. This passage is not intended to be a realistic portrayal of his speech, but rather a narrative device for embedding a whole block of dynastic annals as a sub-list within the 1359 CE main entry.

28. "Aṅhiṅ stutya ri jāṅ bhaṭāra Girinātha pakənanika mogha sanmatan | tan len prārthana hayvaniṅ bhuvana mukhya ri pagəha narendra riṅ prajā" (94.1c–d) (Old Javanese). Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th Century*, 1:37.

29. Peter Worsley, "Some Thoughts About Genre in Old Javanese Literature," *Jumantara: Jurnal Manuskrip Nusantara* 12 (2021): 243–62.

TABLE 2 Annals entries in the main list of the *Deśavarṇana*

Date (CE)	Topic
1334	The king's birth
1350	Death of the king's grandmother
1353	The king's journey to the Pajang district
1354	The king's journey to the Lasem district
1357	The king's journey to the south coast of Java
September 7, 1359	Start of the king's journey to the eastern part of Java
1360	The king's journey to the Tirib and Sempur districts
April–May 1361	The king's journey to the sanctuary at Palah
August–September 1362	Funerary ceremony for the king's grandmother
1363	The king's journey to the Simping district
1364	Death of the chief minister Gajah Mada
August–September 1365	Survey of royal sanctuaries
September 30, 1365	Completion of the *Deśavarṇana*

If we define a sub-list as a series of annals entries in strict ascending order, we find that multiple layers of embedded lists emerge. Certain sub-list entries have their own sub-lists where further background information is given. For example, a block of entries for the accession of the rulers of Kadiri (1222, 1258, 1271 CE) is inserted within the entry for the death of Kṛtanagara (1292 CE), which itself belongs to the dynastic sub-list under the main-list entry for Prapañca's eastern journey (1359 CE). The Kadiri block of entries was placed within the 1292 CE entry in order to explain the historical significance of the latter event: royal power returned to Kadiri upon Kṛtanagara's death, which is why its previous kings are mentioned at this point in the text. The insertion of the Kadiri sub-sub-list into the dynastic annals sub-list provides a good example of how the annals genre incorporates information from different sources into a coherent chronological structure.

The *Deśavarṇana* also gives some important metatextual evidence for the existence of a chronogram annals genre in premodern Java. Prapañca uses the Sanskrit terms *śakakāla* (Śaka time) and *śakābda* (Śaka year) to refer to annals in chronogram form: "My first work was chronogram annals [*śakābda*], and the second was an allegorical poem, and after that was a prose story; after that, the fourth was the *Bhīṣmaśaraṇa* [Refuge of Bhīṣma], and finally a description of stories about the Buddha. It is the

TABLE 3 Annals entries in the Ratnāṁśa sub-list within the *Deśavarṇana*

Date (CE)	Topic
1182	Birth of the future king Rājasa
1222	Rājasa's overthrow of the reigning king Kṛtajaya
1227	Death of Rājasa
1248	Death of his son Anūṣanātha
1254	Consecration of the crown prince Kṛtanagara
1268	Death of the king Viṣṇuvardhana
1270	Kṛtanagara's defeat of the rebel Cayarāja
1275	Military expedition against Malayu in Sumatra
1280	Kṛtanagara's defeat of the rebel Mahiṣa Rangkah
1284	Military expedition against Bali
1292	Death of Kṛtanagara
1294	Kṛtarājasa takes the Majapahit throne
1295	Consecration of his son Jayanagara as crown prince
1309	Death of Kṛtarājasa
1316	Jayanagara's defeat of the rebel Nambi
1328	Death of Jayanagara
1329	Accession of his sister Tribhuvanottuṅgadevī as queen
1331	Defeat of the rebellious districts Sadeng and Keta
1334	Conquest of Bali

chronogram annals [*śakakāla*] and the allegorical poem that I return to, which are in an unfinished state of development."[30] This passage offers some insight into how annals texts were compiled. Prapañca's statement that he had recently resumed work on an unfinished chronogram annals suggests that such texts were continually updated and revised to include new material. It was normal for them to be combined and augmented freely, without compromising the chronological structure of the whole text. For example, there was no impediment to Prapañca incorporating another block of annals

30. "Tambeyanya śakābda piṅrvanika lambaṅ i təlas ika parvasāgara | nāhan teki caturthī Bhīṣmaśaraṇa antyanika Sugataparvavarṇana | lambaṅ mvaṅ śakakāla taṅ vinaluyan gatinika n amə̄vəh turuṅ pəgat" (94.3b–d) (Old Javanese). Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th Century*, 1:73; Worsley, "Fact or Fiction?," 8.

entries reported to him by Ratnāṁśa into the description of his own journey in 1359 CE.

The *Deśavarṇana*, as we have it now, may therefore be the product of multiple rounds of composition and compilation by Prapañca himself. Evidence for this can be seen in the anachronistic description of the chief minister Gajah Mada. In an early part of the poem (12.4), Gajah Mada is depicted as if he were alive, his role is given as "the chief of Majapahit," and his lodgings are described as being in the northeast corner of the compound. But toward the end of the poem (71.1), Gajah Mada's illness and death in 1364 CE are narrated. He was not immediately replaced in his role as chief minister, but the position was still vacant upon the completion of the *Deśavarṇana* on September 30, 1365. Since the earlier description of Gajah Mada's residence within the royal compound is recounted in the narrator's present, it seems to have been written before the story of the chief minister's death.

These techniques of composition are commonly found in annals traditions elsewhere in the world. There are various methods of augmenting an annals text: adding entries year by year, inserting blocks of prewritten entries, or combining individual entries from different sources. Occasionally, annals texts explicitly cite their sources, as in the Wanua Tengah III inscription and the *Deśavarṇana*. But more often, these sources are integrated directly into a new text without any indication of where they originally came from. Subsequent processes of manuscript copying can make it even harder to detect the multiple origins of the historical data presented in the text. This is a crucial consideration for historians who seek to analyze and make use of annals, because it means that many of them cannot be interpreted in a straightforward way. Annals that are compilations of preexisting materials, rather than integral wholes created in one go by a single author, require a tailored approach to their interpretation.

ANNALS AS CONGLOMERATE TEXTS

A remarkable feature of the annals genre is its propensity to form conglomerate texts. The term "conglomerate" here is adapted from its sense in geology, where it refers to a rock composed of preexisting fragments that have been deposited in a fluid environment and then cemented together. The conglomerate rock metaphor describes texts that are formed by the rearrangement of

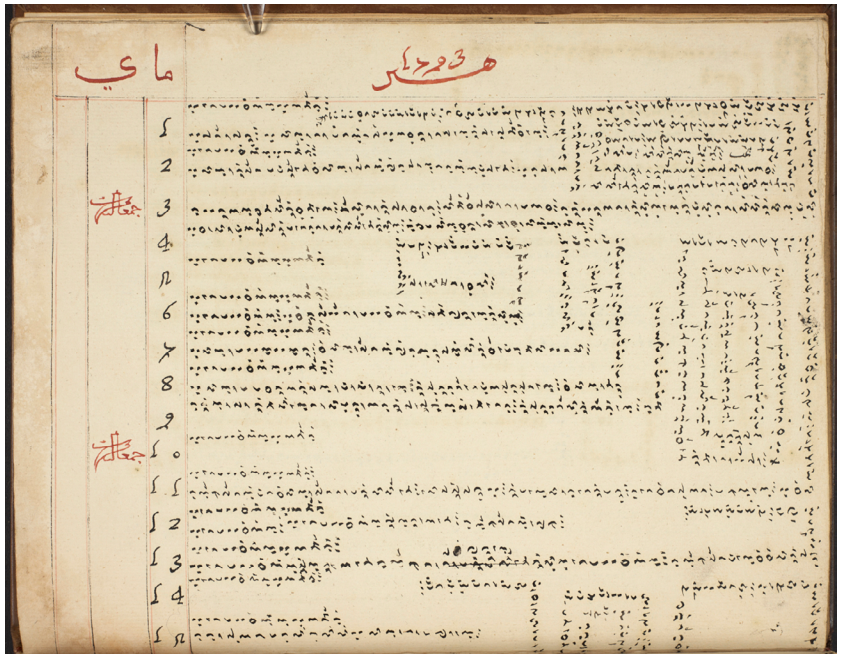


FIGURE 12. Early modern annals text from southern Sulawesi, drawing on premodern genre norms and foreign influence (written 1793–1796 CE). British Library Add MS 12373, f. 7v. Public domain.

older text fragments into a new fixed whole. In a conglomerate text, the differences between those original fragments are preserved in the new compilation, rather than being homogenized or smoothed over. A conglomerate text, therefore, is one that experiences many stages of fragmentation, transmission, and recompilation in its history. As a result, such a text ends up having a complex and heterogeneous form.[31]

The conglomerate model allows us to describe and analyze the development of certain kinds of text. The model is best suited to texts that are copied, excerpted, and reconstituted in manuscript form over a long period of time. Such texts differ from the ideal of the self-contained historical treatise written by a single author-investigator, such as Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War*. The conglomerate model is better suited to texts of multiple authorship, governed by scribal norms that blend the roles of composer, copyist, and editor, such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle(s)*. A globally

31. Wayan Jarrah Sastrawan, "How to Read a Chronicle: The *Pararaton* as a Conglomerate Text," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 48 (2020): 2–23.

influential conglomerate text is the Hebrew Torah, which was compiled over many centuries from a wide range of originally distinct sources.[32]

Premodern Java offers an outstanding example of an annals text that developed a conglomerate form. The *Pararaton* (Monarchs) is a chronogram annals text that tells the story of the main royal dynasty in eastern Java, from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century. It is a prose text in the Middle Javanese language, probably compiled in the early sixteenth century out of older materials. It does not provide the name of its author or any details about when and where it was created. The text is formatted as a single list of chronograms spanning 1222–1481 CE, into which heterogeneous materials like biographical anecdotes and genealogical passages have been incorporated. The narrative begins with the career of the dynasty's progenitor, Angrok, in the early thirteenth century, continues to cover its restoration by King Vijaya at the end of the thirteenth century, and ends with a catalog of events in the fifteenth century.[33] The heterogeneity and inconsistencies its structure indicate that it was not composed at a single time by a single author. Rather, various existing texts were combined and collated at multiple stages, producing the text that we now have.[34] These preexisting source texts were

32. The composition of the Torah has become a topic of considerable scholarly debate since the 1970s, as the once-mainstream documentary hypothesis (positing that four independent documentary sources were combined to make the canonical text) has come to be challenged by competing theories. Despite their disagreements, all scholars accept that the canonical Torah is the product of diverse text fragments, whose combination resulted in a multitude of redundancies, contradictions, discontinuities, and inconsistencies. Baruch J. Schwartz, "The Documentary Hypothesis," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Pentateuch*, edited by Joel S. Baden and Jeffrey Stackert (Oxford University Press, 2021), 165–87.

33. Only one critical edition of the *Pararaton* has been published, edited by J. L. A. Brandes in 1896. The second edition of 1920 reproduced the same text with minor typographical corrections and an expanded apparatus. Subsequent editions of the *Pararaton* have either been derived from Brandes's critical edition or present diplomatic editions of individual manuscript witnesses. The 1896 first edition is quoted throughout the book. J. L. A. Brandes, ed. and trans., *Pararaton (Ken Arok) of Het Boek der Koningen van Tumapël en van Majapahit*, Verhandelingen van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen 49 (Albrecht, 1896); J. L. A. Brandes, ed. and trans., N. J. Krom, ed., with J. C. G. Jonker, H. Kraemer, and Poerbatjaraka, *Pararaton (Ken Arok) of Het Boek der Koningen van Tumapël en van Majapahit*, 2nd ed., Verhandelingen van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen 62 (Martinus Nijhoff, 1920).

34. These features of the structure and composition of the *Pararaton* were discussed at length by the historian N. J. Krom. The philologist J. J. Ras studied the *Pararaton*'s heterogeneous form and plural authorship in the course of his preparation of a new critical edition, which was not yet published at the time of his death. N. J. Krom, "De samenstelling van de Pararaton," *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 60 (1921), 86–103.; J. J. Ras,

then cemented together, arranged in strict chronological order, to make a single whole: the *Pararaton*.

The annals entries of the *Pararaton* form a single-level sequence, without the embedding of sub-lists and sub-sub-lists that is found in the *Deśavarṇana*. The source materials are grafted onto the chronological frame in different ways depending on the type of material. Short narrative sections are usually linked directly to a single chronogram. Longer biographical episodes are attached to chronograms that mark their concluding event. Genealogical passages, which cover births and marriages over several years, are placed between sequences of chronograms without being explicitly linked to any specific year. Table 4 lists the dated entries included in the *Pararaton*.

Much of the *Pararaton*'s content was created before the date of the final event narrated in the text: a volcanic eruption in 1481 CE.[35] The earliest material, concerning Angrok's childhood, cannot have been written before his birth in 1182 CE.[36] Given the idealized character of this biographical narrative, it most likely postdates his death by many years. The compilation of this preexisting material occurred sometime in the sixteenth century, possibly in multiple stages from 1481 CE until the date of the oldest complete manuscript in 1600 CE.[37] Several features of the current text show clear evidence that they were previously separate documents: the combination of different royal chronologies, the redistribution of chronicle entries pertaining to chief ministers, and the varying use of honorifics throughout the text.

"Hikayat Banjar and Pararaton: A Structural Comparison of Two Chronicles," in *A Man of Indonesian Letters: Essays in Honour of Professor A. Teeuw*, edited by C. M. S. Hellwig and S. O. Robson (Foris, 1986), 184–203.

35. "Tumuli guntur pavatugunuṅ i Śaka kayāmbara sagareku, 1403" (32.26) (Middle Javanese). This convention of referring to eruptions by the week in which they happened is also found in later examples of the chronogram list genre, such as in the eighteenth-century chronicle *Babad ing Sangkala*: "The Wariga eruption was in three–eyes–colors–tail" (Duk guntur pawariga, tri nétra warnèku, 1.4) (Modern Javanese), i.e., in the week Wariga in the year 1423 Śaka (1501 CE). The names of the weeks recur in a thirty-week cycle, which is significantly shorter than a calendar year. As a result, this method of specifying the timing of eruption events often produces ambiguity, since any named week (for example, Wariga) usually occurs once early in the year and again later in the same year. Brandes, *Pararaton*, 32; Sastrawan, "Natural Disasters Throughout Indonesian History," 24.

36. This date does not appear in the *Pararaton* itself but is given in the *Deśavarṇana* (40.1).

37. This is a palm-leaf manuscript with shelf mark 19 L 600 in the National Library of Indonesia, whose colophon bears the chronogram "two–wings–domains–tail" (*lara pakṣa misayeku*), corresponding to 1522 Śaka (1600 CE).

TABLE 4 Annals entries in the *Pararaton*

Date (CE)	Entry
1222	Angrok becomes sovereign
1247	Angrok dies and is enshrined
1248	Anūṣapati[a] becomes sovereign
1249	Anūṣapati dies and is enshrined
1250	Tohjaya dies and is enshrined
1271	Viṣṇuvardhana founds palace at Canggu Lor
1272	Viṣṇuvardhana dies and is enshrined
1275	Expedition to the land of Malayu Fall of the Tumapel court
1276	Jayakatwang[b] becomes sovereign at Daha
1294	Vijaya becomes sovereign at Majapahit
1335 (*recte* 1295)[c]	Vijaya dies, Jayanagara becomes sovereign
1295	Lawe dies
1300 or 1311[d]	Sora dies
1311	Eruption of Lungge[e]
1313	Juru Demung dies
1314	Gajah Biru dies
1316	The Lamajang district is defeated by Majapahit
1318	Semi dies in battle
1328	Jayanagara assassinated by Tañca
1328	Tribhuvana becomes sovereign
1331	Sadeng rebellion
1334	Eruption of moving water (*banyu pindah*)
1357	Massacre of the Sundanese Conquest of the land of Dompo
1362	Funerary ceremony
1368	Gajah Mada dies
1371	Gajah Enggon becomes chief minister
1376	Anyar ("new") mountain event
1385	Eruption in the week of Madangsia
1386	Lord of Tumapel dies
1388	Lord of Pamotan dies
1389	Lord Wekas ing Sukha dies Lord Viśeṣa becomes sovereign
1397	Eruption in the week of Prangbakat

(*continued*)

TABLE 4 (*continued*)

Date (CE)	Entry
1398	Gajah Enggon dies Gajah Manguri becomes chief minister
1399	Lord Wekas ing Sukha dies
1400	Lord Viśeṣa becomes an ascetic
1401	Lord Viśeṣa fights with the Lord of Vīrabhūmi
1406	Lord of Vīrabhūmi dies in the Regreg war
1410	Gajah Manguri dies Gajah Lembana becomes chief minister
1421 (*recte* 1412)[f]	Eruption in the week of Julungpujut
1413	Gajah Lembana dies Tuhan Kanaka becomes chief minister
1416	The great "platform" event (a funeral?)[g]
1426	Major famine
1427	Lord of Tumapel dies
1429	The sovereign dies
1430 (numeral: 1441)[h]	Tuhan Kanaka dies
1433	Raden Gajah dies
1437	Lord of Daha is installed
1446	The prince consort dies
1447	The sovereign Queen dies
1440[i]	Earthquake
1451	Eruption in the week of Kuningan
1451	The sovereign Kṛtavijaya dies Lord of Pamotan becomes the sovereign called Sinagara
1453	Sinagara dies and is enshrined
1456	Lord Pūrvaviśeṣa becomes the sovereign
1462	Eruption in the week of Landep
1464	Lord of Daha dies
1466	Lord Pūrvaviśeṣa dies
1466	Lord of Pandan Salas dies
1478	The sovereign dies in the palace
1481	Eruption in the week of Watugunung

[a]The names Anūṣapati in the *Pararaton* and Anūṣanātha in the *Deśavarṇana* are equivalent, since *pati* and *nātha* are synonyms meaning "king." Both names refer to the thirteenth-century ruler who was posthumously enshrined at the temple site of Kidal, which can still be visited on the outskirts of Malang City in East Java. Hadi Sidomulyo, "From Kuṭa Rāja to Singhāsari: Towards a Revision of the Dynastic History of 13th Century Java," *Archipel* 80 (2010): 104.

[b]This king's name is spelled Jayakatyeng in the Mula Malurung inscription (1255 CE). The alternation of consonant clusters *ty* and *tw* is common in Old Javanese.

[c]It is very likely that this date, given as 1257 Śaka (1335 CE) in the text, is a scribal mistake for 1217 Śaka (1295 CE)—a simple error in the tens digit of the Śaka year numeral. The entry lacks the expected chronogram, which indicates that the date may have become distorted during the text's transmission. Sastrawan, "How to Read a Chronicle," 14n58.

[d]The year numeral given in the text is 1222 Śaka (1300 CE), but the chronogram "coals–coals–hands–person" (*ha ha tañan voṅ*) instead suggests 1233 Śaka (1311 CE). The word *ha*, "coals," is uncommon in chronograms, though the Linggawani inscription from western Java apparently confirms that *ha* represents 3. Since both interpretations are consistent with the entry's position in chronological order, neither is preferred in this table. Noorduyn, "Some Remarks on Javanese Chronogram Words: A Case of localization," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 149 (1993), 313; Aditia Gunawan and Arlo Griffiths, "Old Sundanese Inscriptions: Renewing the Philological Approach," *Archipel* 101 (2021): 190–1.

[e]For a detailed discussion of the references to natural disasters in the *Pararaton*, see Sastrawan, "Portents of Power."

[f]The chronogram for this entry is "bodies–Vedas–qualities–person" (*kaya veda guṇaniṅ voṅ*), which corresponds to 1343 Śaka (1421 CE). Since this entry occurs between those dated 1332 Śaka (1410 CE) and 1335 Śaka (1413 CE), it is likely that the units and tens words have been transposed, and that the chronogram should be emended to read "Vedas–bodies–qualities–person," hence 1334 Śaka (1412 CE).

[g]This entry is referred to as *palantaran*, from the base word *lantaran*, which Zoetmulder defines as "that along which or on which one makes one's way to reach something, way, staircase or platform (over the funeral pyre), mats or carpets spread on the road." Since the *Pararaton* lists another funeral event in 1362 CE, it may be that this 1416 CE entry is referring to the platform placed above a funeral pyre in the pre-Islamic practice of *satī*, in which widows immolated themselves in the funeral pyre of their deceased husband. This interpretation is reflected in Phalgunadi's translation of the text, but it remains provisional for lack of corroborating evidence. Zoetmulder, *Old Javanese–English Dictionary* (KITLV, 1982), s.v. "lantar"; Creese, *Women of the Kakawin World*, 210–44; I Gusti Putu Phalgunadi, *The Pararaton: A Study of the Southeast Asian Chronicle* (Sundeep Prakashan, 1996), 133.

[h]The year numeral is given as 1363 Śaka (1441 CE). However, the chronogram "wings–skies–qualities–person" (*pakṣa vihat guṇaniṅ voṅ*) clearly indicates that the correct year is 1352 Śaka (1430 CE), which fits in the chronological order. The error in the numeral raises the possibility that the figures were added to the text after the chronograms were composed and placed in order.

[i]This is the only entry that appears to have been placed out of order during the original compilation process. The two other entries placed out of order (1335 CE and 1421 CE) were probably erroneously copied in subsequent manuscript transmission.

The chronogram list that forms the *Pararaton*'s skeleton is itself a combination of previously separate documents. This can be seen by the redundant duplication of certain entries in the list. For example, five instances of royal succession are described twice each, which suggests that there were originally two lists of dates that were later combined into one (table 5). The second of these transitions of power, from Wekas ing Sukha to his son-in-law Viśeṣa, exemplifies this phenomenon well. The text contains two separate entries for this single event ("Lord Wekas ing Sukha died"), respectively dated 1389 CE and 1399 CE.[38] Scholars have attempted to resolve this contradiction by positing

38. "Bhra hyaṅ Vəkas iṅ Sukha mokta" (30.24 and 30.31).

TABLE 5 Duplicated annals entries for royal successions in the *Pararaton*

Royal succession	Chronogram	Date (CE)
Vijaya → Jayanagara	—	1335 (*recte* 1295)
	—	1309
Wekas ing Sukha → Viśeṣa	earths–forms–fathers–tail	1389
	persons–eyes–fires–moon	1399
Viśeṣa → The Queen	eyes–wings–fires–moon	1399
	—	1429
The Queen → Kṛtavijaya	forms–winds–fires–moon	1429
	nine–feelings–fires–moon	1447
Rājasavardhana → Girīśavardhana	—	1451
	brahmins–snakes–fires–moon	1466

the existence of two distinct individuals named Wekas ing Sukha who died in different years, but these arguments are unconvincing on historical grounds.[39] It makes more sense to suppose that two conflicting timelines of Wekas ing Sukha's life have become fused into a single document. The compiler of the *Pararaton*, who may not have had access to direct evidence that corroborated one version over the other, inserted each of them in their respective places in the chronological order of the whole. This duplication of entries in the *Pararaton* occurs only for these five royal successions, not for other sorts of historical event. This strengthens the hypothesis that the duplication is the result of the fusion of a separate chronogram list concerning the deaths of kings and queens.

Further evidence of the incorporation of previously standalone documents into the *Pararaton* is found in the entries about the kingdom's chief ministers (*patih*). A consistent mismatch between the years of these entries and the ministers' stated periods of office suggests that the list previously existed as a separate document that was divided up and interpolated within the *Pararaton* text. As a result of the way the original document was divided, the periods of office became separated from the chronogram dates to which they pertain. The process can be reconstructed as follows. The original stand-alone list of the ministers' periods of office consisted of entries for each minister, which contained three elements in order: a statement of their

39. Sastrawan, "How to Read a Chronicle," 9–12.

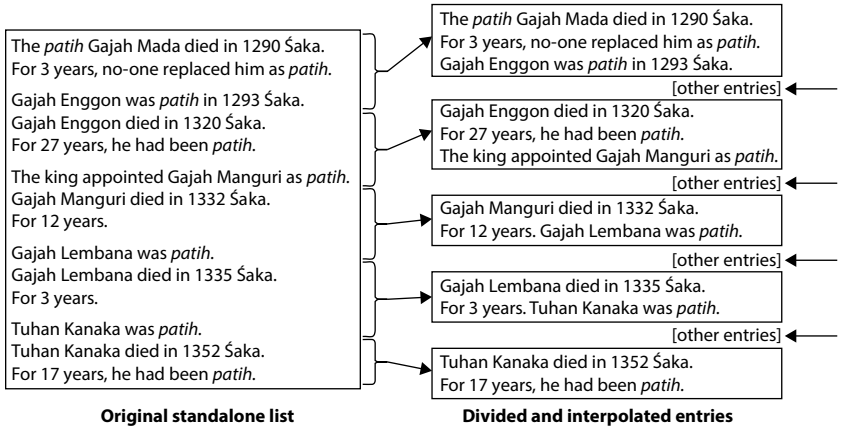

The *patih* Gajah Mada died in 1290 Śaka.
For 3 years, no-one replaced him as *patih*.
Gajah Enggon was *patih* in 1293 Śaka.
Gajah Enggon died in 1320 Śaka.
For 27 years, he had been *patih*.
The king appointed Gajah Manguri as *patih*.
Gajah Manguri died in 1332 Śaka.
For 12 years.
Gajah Lembana was *patih*.
Gajah Lembana died in 1335 Śaka.
For 3 years.
Tuhan Kanaka was *patih*.
Tuhan Kanaka died in 1352 Śaka.
For 17 years, he had been *patih*.
Original standalone list
The *patih* Gajah Mada died in 1290 Śaka.
For 3 years, no-one replaced him as *patih*.
Gajah Enggon was *patih* in 1293 Śaka.
[other entries]
Gajah Enggon died in 1320 Śaka.
For 27 years, he had been *patih*.
The king appointed Gajah Manguri as *patih*.
[other entries]
Gajah Manguri died in 1332 Śaka.
For 12 years. Gajah Lembana was *patih*.
[other entries]
Gajah Lembana died in 1335 Śaka.
For 3 years. Tuhan Kanaka was *patih*.
[other entries]
Tuhan Kanaka died in 1352 Śaka.
For 17 years, he had been *patih*.
Divided and interpolated entries

FIGURE 13. Diagram of the process by which the chief ministers' list was divided and interpolated in the *Pararaton*.

appointment (optionally including the year), the year of their death, and the total duration of their tenure. This stand-alone list was then interpolated into the new *Pararaton* annals text. However, in the process of dividing the original list, the first element of each entry (statement of appointment) became attached to the end of the previous entry (duration of tenure). For example, the statement "Gajah Lembana was *patih*" was erroneously linked to the preceding statement "for twelve years," which originally referred to the tenure of his predecessor Gajah Manguri. This error in dividing and interpolating the original minister list resulted in the *Pararaton* presenting a faulty chronology, because the durations of office were wrongly attributed to the incoming minister instead of the outgoing one. This phenomenon shows how the integration of source materials into the *Pararaton* could result in major chronological confusion.[40]

The sources that were compiled to form the *Pararaton* were written at different times, ranging from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century. This is demonstrated by a shift in the titulature used for aristocratic figures within the text. In the passages set in the thirteenth century, individuals are referred to by unique identifiers: either by a noble title plus a personal

40. Brandes noticed this feature of the minister list and accounted for it in his Dutch translation, but it has rarely been mentioned in subsequent scholarship. Brandes, *Pararaton*, 168.

name or by their courtly name (*panji*).[41] By contrast, in the passages set in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, dynastic figures are referred to as the lord of a particular palace; for example, *bhaṭāra i Daha*, "Lord of Daha," usually abbreviated to *bhre Daha*. These palace references are not unique identifiers, because multiple individuals assumed rulership over a palace in succession, and an individual might transfer from palace to palace during their lifetime. Comparison of the use of the titles *panji* and *bhaṭāra* in other texts helps to determine when different source materials of the *Pararaton* were first written. In the Old Javanese epigraphical corpus, the title *panji* is found from the mid-eleventh century through to the late fourteenth century. By contrast, the first use of *bhaṭāra* as a palace reference first appears in the Śilāmaṇikuṇḍala inscription (1350 CE), together with *panji*: "the leader, with the courtly name [*panji*] Pupon. Thus was the decree of the lord at [*bhaṭāre*] Matahun."[42] The use of *bhaṭāra* became standard in Javanese royal epigraphy of the fifteenth century, as elaborately shown in the Waringin Pitu (1447 CE) and Trailokyapuri (1486 CE) inscriptions. The *panji* titles had gone into abeyance by the beginning of the fifteenth century, which makes it possible to set a rough boundary period for the composition of the *Pararaton* sections using *panji* (fourteenth century or earlier) and those using *bhaṭāra* (mid-fourteenth century or later).

The use of nonspecific palace references, such as the "Lord of Daha," offers further evidence of the compilation process. Individuals are referred to as the lord of a particular palace without any effort to disambiguate previous and current holders of the position, which suggests that these passages were intended to describe the situation at the time of writing. A document about contemporary politics would not need to specify the personal identity of each lord, because palace references would always refer to the current incumbent without ambiguity. For comparison, it is clear who the Prince of Wales is at the present time, but we need to disambiguate the reference when dealing with multiple generations. Only after these originally separate documents

41. Jiří Jákl, "The Figure of Pañji in Old Javanese Sources: What Is in a Name?," *Wacana* 21 (2020): 28–41.

42. "Juru saṅ apañji Pupon, maṅkana saṅ ājñā paduka bhaṭāre Matahun" (4–5) (Old Javanese). Quoted from the edition published in the report of the 2023 BRIN-EFEO epigraphical field study of eastern Java. Titi Surti Nastiti, Churmatin Nasoichah, Hedwi Prihatmoko, Lisda Meyanti, Arlo Griffiths, Adeline Levivier, and Eko Bastiawan, *Survei prasasti zaman Hindu-Buddha di Provinsi Jawa Timur, Kota dan Kabupaten Pasuruan, Malang, Blitar, Tulungagung, Trenggalek, Kediri, dan Nganjuk, tahun 2023* (Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2025), 172.

were compiled into the whole *Pararaton* text did there emerge any ambiguity about the personal identities of various lords.

All of these ambiguities, nonuniformities, and inconsistencies in the *Pararaton* result directly from the accommodating nature of the annals genre. Any textual material can be incorporated into an annals framework, no matter its original source. The compilers of the *Pararaton*, like the poet of the *Deśavarṇana*, used the chronogram annals genre to integrate a diverse range of historical information into a new variegated whole. But the conglomerate nature of these texts, discernible in the *Pararaton*, meant that it was difficult to impose a unitary version of events after the text's compilation. This was all the more challenging because conflicting versions of events could not be harmonized by recourse to original written records. Such evidence had likely been lost or become inaccessible, due to the perishability of manuscripts and the disruption to institutions discussed in earlier chapters. The annals genre thus offers advantages in its capacity to incorporate diverse source materials, but it also poses particular challenges because it can generate internal contradictions that cannot be easily resolved.

ANNALS AS HISTORY

Annals texts provide many benefits for the study of the past. They can incorporate diverse source materials, while imposing a chronological order by breaking them up into individual dated entries. Annals are a characteristically accommodating genre. If segments of historical information can be assigned a date, they can be included within an annals entry without having to conform to any uniform style. Modern scholars have often viewed annals as a basic and primitive form of historiography, but they can have intricate structures and complex ideological positions. Poetry, family trees, calendrical calculations, gnomic wisdom, geographical descriptions, tax regulations, and all manner of other valuable data can be found embedded within annals. The *Deśavarṇana* and *Pararaton*, for example, are just as valuable for their geographical and cultural knowledge as for the political events they list.

The accommodating nature of annals gives rise to challenges of interpretation, which we need to take seriously when reading them as historical sources. Annalists usually integrate content from their sources directly into the compiled text without giving any clear indication of its origins. Unless the compiler actively imposes uniformity and consistency, the resulting text

often exhibits heterogeneous styles, plot contradictions, redundant descriptions, and complex conglomerate structures. When different sources disagree with each other, there is no internal mechanism for determining which version is more accurate. If access to original documents is limited, as it was in premodern Java, then the annalists cannot easily correct mistakes from the original sources that have filtered into the new compilation. As a result, inconsistencies are rife within annals texts; the *Pararaton*'s duplication of entries for royal successions is a case in point. This outcome is not due to poor judgment on the part of the compilers. Instead, it results from the intrinsic character of annals themselves, especially when they develop without the support of a robust documentary record. These features of the annals genre in premodern Java prompt us to pay close attention to the textual conditions and processes underlying their composition. Doing so will give us better tools to interpret these multifaceted historical sources.

FOUR

The Heroic in History

AS FAR BACK AS WE CAN TRACE, the past has been told in stories about heroes. These stories construe exceptional individuals as the primary agents of history, whose character and behavior transform the world. Such heroes are usually men, usually warriors, and usually aristocrats.[1] In the mid-nineteenth century, the Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle expressed this view of history in florid language: "In all epochs of the world's history, we shall find the Great Man to have been the indispensable saviour of his epoch;—the lightning, without which the fuel never would have burnt. The History of the World, I said already, was the Biography of Great Men."[2]

Why have hero stories played such a major role in the practice of history for millennia? One reason is that heroic biographies offer advantages that other genres do not. They encourage historians to center interpersonal conflict, political struggle, and divine fate in their explanations of the past. They provide opportunities for literary artistry, often drawing on the poetic and dramatic techniques of epic and romance genres. Heroic biographies offer a coherent, if somewhat blinkered, vision of the past: one in which the mighty command the stage of history, and the world is dominated by the forces of personality and destiny. For many premodern communities, heroic

1. There are important exceptions to each of these generalizations. For example, female warriors are frequently the subject of heroic depiction in history and literature. Some folk heroes like Robin Hood are depicted as emerging from non-noble origins to achieve great deeds. A. J. Pollard, *Imagining Robin Hood: The Late Medieval Stories in Historical Context* (Routledge, 2004); Boyd Cothran, Joan Judge, and Adrian Shubert, *Women Warriors and National Heroes: Global Histories* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

2. Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*. Edited by David R. Sorensen and Brent E. Kinser (Yale University Press, 2013), 30.

biographies provided the most persuasive explanations for the big events in their history.

Today, historians are generally skeptical of such heroic perspectives. Carlyle's Great Man theory of history is rightly criticized for its disregard of social structures and processes, for its elitist focus on a handful of privileged individuals, and for its lack of critical acuity. Heroic biographies rarely make clear the sources on which their claims are based. When appraising their value as evidence, we are concerned that they stray too far from verifiable facts. The lives of their protagonists are full of superhuman deeds and miraculous occurrences, which modern readers cannot accept as realistic and plausible. In many heroic biographies, such as medieval tales of the Frankish kings or Islamic stories about Alexander the Great, the line between history and legend is unclear. All this has led some historians to dismiss heroic biographies as not being properly historical. But this dismissal forecloses some important questions: why did people choose to cast their knowledge of the past in the form of heroic biography, and how has this genre shaped historical practices across the globe?

This chapter begins with a survey of the heroic biography genre in premodern Java, highlighting its similarities to those in other parts of the world. A type of heroic biography in narrative verse developed on the island around the fifteenth century, emerging out of the preexisting genres of royal panegyric and epic poetry. The chapter proceeds to a close study of three heroic biographies of Vijaya, the first king of the Majapahit court (r. 1293–1309 CE). It elucidates the distinctive styles of historical explanation that are encouraged by the heroic biography genre, which center on interpersonal relationships between leaders, moral laws, and notions of fate. Finally, the chapter shows how heroic biographies draw on established poetic and dramatic conventions, thereby fashioning historical knowledge in a garb of literary artistry. The entwinement of history and literature in the heroic biographies of premodern Java therefore prompts us to question the conventional dichotomy between them.

THE HEROIC BIOGRAPHY GENRE

Traditions of heroic biography developed independently in many contexts, but there are enough similarities among these traditions to speak of a coherent genre across the world. Heroic biographies construe historical events as

being driven the actions, emotions, relationships, and personalities of heroes. Their plots involve specific kinds of historical explanation, in which fate, loyalty, piety, and valor are the principal causes of momentous change in the world. Their range of subject matter is correspondingly narrow, as they focus primarily on political, military, and religious conflicts. They often exhibit sophisticated poetic and dramatic techniques that highlight their qualities as literary art.

Written heroic biographies survive from over 4,500 years ago. They emerged in parallel with the development of expansive states and elaborate social hierarchies. Ancient Egyptian biographies, which are attested from the beginning of the Old Kingdom (twenty-sixth century BCE), tell of the deeds and characters of royals and high officials in glorious terms.[3] Heroic biographies of Mesopotamian kings such as Sargon and Narām-Sîn, probably drawing on oral-mnemonic traditions, were written down from the eighteenth century BCE onward.[4] Certain historical figures spawned entire cycles of heroic biography, such as Alexander the Great, whose life is told of in a plethora of premodern texts across the length of Eurasia.[5] The heroic depiction of historical figures is not limited to premodern cultures; it is also widespread in modern societies, for example, in representations of the female British leader Boudica in early modern and Victorian England.[6]

Heroic biographies of historical persons share many similarities with those of legendary figures. They often draw on the genre conventions of epic poetry and mythological tales. Norms of characterization, plot structure, poetic embellishment, and moral tone are generally shared between historical and legendary biographies. Professional historians strive to distinguish historical from legendary figures by recourse to primary source documents and to criteria of plausibility. But there are strong consistencies in the way heroes are depicted in their biographies, regardless of whether modern scholars now consider them to have really existed. To understand how the heroic

3. Elizabeth Frood, "Biographical Monuments: Displaying Selves and Lives in Ancient Egypt," in *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Biography*, edited by Koen De Temmerman (Oxford University Press, 2020).

4. Westenholz, "Historical Events and the Process of Their Transformation in Akkadian Heroic Traditions."

5. Su Fang Ng, *Alexander the Great from Britain to Southeast Asia: Peripheral Empires in the Global Renaissance* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

6. Martha Vandrei, *Queen Boudica and Historical Culture in Britain: An Image of Truth* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

FIGURE 14. Fifteenth-century French illustrated manuscript of the *Alexander Romance*. British Library, Royal MS 20 XX, f. 79. Public domain.

biography genre shapes historical practice, we need to appreciate its links to other literary genres beyond those that are currently accepted as historical.

In premodern Java, the oldest precursor of heroic biographies was the royal panegyric genre discussed in chapter 2, which draws on the sophisticated literary conventions of the Indic *praśasti* genre. The earliest extant inscriptions from Java depict historical figures using vivid expressions of heroism that belong to the conventional vocabularies of Sanskrit epic poetry and political theory. The fifth- or sixth-century Jambu inscription depicts King Pūrṇavarman as a martial hero "ever dextrous in demolishing his enemies' towns."[7] In the Canggal inscription (732 CE), the issuing king Sañjaya is described as "understanding the subtle meanings of the treatises," "excelling in bravery and other qualities," "being like Raghu," and "having conquered many surrounding kings."[8] The Kelurak inscription (782 CE) describes the reigning king as a beneficent and almighty ruler: "By that steadfast king who is the ornament of the Śailendra dynasty, who confers prosperity as the dust of his

7. "Arinagarotsādane nityadakṣa" (line 2) (Sanskrit). Quoted from the edition and translation of Sarkar, *Corpus of the Inscriptions of Java*, 1:9–10.

8. "Śāstrasūkṣmārthavedī śauryādiguṇyo Raghur iva vijitānekasā[mantaca]kraḥ rājā" (stanza 11) (Sanskrit). Quoted from the edition and translation of Sarkar, *Corpus of the Inscriptions of Java*, 1:20–21.

lotus feet is worshiped with excellent jewels, lotus flowers and so forth after having bowed down with the head, the earth is sustained."[9]

The most elaborate heroic biography found among the inscriptions of Java is in the Pucangan inscription (1041 CE). Already discussed in the previous chapter as an example of the annals format, this inscription's portrayal of Airlangga is extremely idealized. It employs the full range of poetic tropes and stereotypes of heroism. Stanza 4 uses the Sanskrit poetic figure of *parisaṁkhyā* (double entendre) to couch effusive praise in pretended criticism of the king.[10] In stanzas 12, 24, and 26, Airlangga is explicitly compared to the epic hero Rāma. Stanzas 16–22, containing the description of Airlangga's military campaigns in the 1020s CE, are hyperbolic in their praise: "In defeat just as in victory, his effulgence incessantly causes wonder."[11] The skillful composition of the Pucangan inscription shows that its writer was very familiar with the substance and techniques of Sanskrit poetry, deliberately using them to depict Airlangga as a hero in the mold of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and later Sanskrit court poetry (*kāvya*).[12] The Old Javanese side of the stone is written in a similarly grandiose style, often mimicking the phrasing of the Sanskrit stanzas.

A later development of the panegyric can also be found in several Javanese inscriptions issued in the thirteenth century. The Mula Malurung inscription (1255 CE), issued in eastern Java by King Viṣṇuvardhana shortly after he took the throne, gives extensive biographical information about a high official called the Prāṇarāja (Breath of the king), the beneficiary of a tax grant attached to the villages of Mula and Malurung.[13] The historical value of this inscription lies its detailed listing of the previous kings whom the

9. "Śailendravaṁśatilakena mahodayena | yasya kramāmbujarajaḥ śirasā praṇamya | sampūjyate pravararatnasaroruhādyai | rājñā dhṛtā dhṛtimatā dharaṇīndranāmnā" (stanza 5) (Sanskrit). Quoted from Mark Long's edition and translation. Long, *Voices from the Mountain*, 89.

10. Quoted from a new text edition, English translation, and analysis of the Pucangan inscription in preparation by Czaba Dezső and Arlo Griffiths, "The Pucangan Inscription of Airlangga, King of Java" (DHARMA). See also H. Kern, "De steen van den berg Pĕnanggungan."

11. "[Jyotis ta]sya parājaye vijayavac citrīyate santatam" (18d). The Sanskrit text and English translation are by Dezső and Griffiths, "Pucangan," §2.1.

12. Dezső and Griffiths, "Pucangan," §3.1.

13. The Mula Malurung inscription has been reedited by Eko Bastiawan and Arlo Griffiths (DHARMA). The text was previously edited by Titi Surti Nastiti and published by Hadi Sidomulyo as an appendix to his article. Hadi Sidomulyo, "From Kuṭa Rāja to Singhāsari," 106–14.

FIGURE 15. Wooden puppet of the hero Wibisana (Vibhīṣaṇa) of the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic, from Tasikmalaya, western Java. Collection of Auckland Museum Tamaki Paenga Hira, 2004.89.147. CC-BY.

Prāṇarāja served, and the manner in which he contributed to the establishment of Viṣṇuvardhana's reign after a period of dynastic struggle. The narrative of the Prāṇarāja's activities is not structured as a list of dated annals entries like Airlangga's biography in the Pucangan inscription. Instead, events in the Mula Malurung inscription are dated by reference to the reigns and deaths of the king's predecessors. Throughout the narrative of his career of service, the Prāṇarāja is described in idealized terms that justify his receiving a grant from the king.

The Kudadu inscription (1294 CE) was issued by Vijaya, the first king at Majapahit.[14] It contains a detailed historical narrative of events in 1292 CE that brought Vijaya to power, describing at length how he led a military force to defend the previous king Kṛtanagara. Despite winning several victories, Vijaya began to lose ground to the king's enemies and was forced to seek protection in the village of Kudadu. The villagers hid Vijaya from the enemy troops, thereby giving him the opportunity to flee to Madura and to regroup with his allies there. This lucky escape allowed Vijaya to eventually return to Java and take the throne for himself. The historical passage in this inscription therefore serves to provide context for the new king's debt of gratitude toward the village of Kudadu. The Kudadu inscription's narrative is structured as a journey, following Vijaya's advances and retreats at the head of his army, which is divided into undated sections by the phrase "it was then that . . ." (*irika ta*). It is geographically specific but chronologically vague. In the Kudadu inscription, the toponyms serve to mark the sites where Vijaya's army did battle, set up camp, or sought refuge. The level of geographical detail given in this narrative suggests that Vijaya was at pains to emphasize his close connection to the communities and territories listed in the inscription.

14. This inscription was first discovered by European scholars in the late eighteenth century. It was published in partial facsimile, accompanied by a highly problematic English translation, by T. S. Raffles in 1817. An edition and Dutch translation of the first extant part of the inscription was published by Brandes in 1896, followed by the second part in 1913. A revised English translation by Stuart Robson was published in 2013 as an appendix to David Bade's book *Of Palm Wine, Women, and War*. The Kudadu inscription is the subject of a revised edition and English translation by Arlo Griffiths and Marine Schoettel (DHARMA). T. S. Raffles, *The History of Java*, 2 vols. (London, 1817), 2:58–59; Brandes, *Pararaton*, 76–85; Brandes, *Oud-Javaansche Oorkonden*, 195–98; Stuart Robson, "The History and Legend of the Foundation of Majapahit," in *Of Palm-Wine, Women, and War: The Mongolian Naval Expedition to Java in the 13th Century*, edited by David Bade (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2013), 181–205; Wayan Jarrah Sastrawan, "Raffles as a Historian of Java," in *Raffles Revisited: Essays on Collecting and Colonialism in Java, Singapore, and Sumatra*, edited by Stephen Murphy (Asian Civilisations Museum, 2021), 180–93.

The Sukhāmṛta inscription (1296 CE) was issued by Vijaya two years after the Kudadu inscription. This charter records a reward given to another loyal supporter of the new king: an official known by the courtly name (*panji*) Pati-pati. The inscription narrates the career of the Pati-pati, emphasizing his lifetime of service to Vijaya. The characterizations of the king and his servant are idealized, and there is extensive use of Sanskrit parallel passages for literary embellishment. For example, Vijaya is described in heroic terms in this bilingual passage in Old Javanese and Sanskrit; the Sanskrit clauses are underlined in the translation: "The best proof that the king is a warrior and part-divine, who descended from heaven in the form of a man with good characteristics, for he is an excellent god who descended from heaven in the form of a prince with good characteristics, shall be that his true nature is to be strong, faithful, peaceful, proper, beloved by good people, most heroic in battle, undisturbed by armies of multitudes, possessing wealth of gold et cetera. All of that is his true nature; it is the proof that he is a divine incarnation."[15] In other parts of the Sukhāmṛta inscription, allusions to figures from Indic mythology (Kṛṣṇa, Kaṁsa, Viriñci, Nārāyaṇa, and Śaṁkara) are used to establish Vijaya as a hero modeled on the Sanskrit epics.

As in the Kudadu charter, the historical passage in the Sukhāmṛta inscription is not divided into dated entries. Many events are given only a vague temporal marker, in contrast to the precise chronologies found in the annals genre. Certain events are connected to the lifetimes of rulers: "in the past when his Majesty Kṛtanagara died," and "once he had become king."[16] Special attention is drawn to the parallelism between the Pati-pati's career and that of his father who served an earlier king: "The Pati-pati used his father as a mirror. . . . Like father like son, the Pati-pati likewise aspired to emulate the loyalty of his father."[17] This indexing of historical events to the lives or careers of important people, rather than to calendar dates,

15. "Śrī mahārāja pva sira kṣatriya devāṁśa, sulakṣaṇanararūpasvargāvatīrṇa, apan sira devatā viśeṣa tumurun sakeṅ svarga makarūpa rājaputra sulakṣaṇa, paṅatibyaktana, dhīrasatyaśāntasuśīlakuśalajanapriyaraṇātiśūrabalakoṭyasaṁkulakanakādidhanasampannasvabhāvaṁ makasvabhāva ta sira irika kabaih ya tika paṅliṅgan i sira an devamūrti" (6r.1–5) (Sanskrit and Old Javanese). Quoted from the edition by Arlo Griffiths and Marine Schoettel (DHARMA). The text was previously published by Boechari, *Prasasti Koleksi Museum Nasional*, 139–47.

16. "Ṅuni ri līna bhaṭāra śrī Kṛtanagara" (5r.5); "Riṅ samaṅkana ta sirān paṅadəg prabhu" (7r.3–4).

17. "Makadarpaṇa ta saṅ apañji Pati-pati ri rāma. . . . Yathā pitā tathā putra, maṅkana ta aṅən-aṅən saṅ apañji Pati-pati tumirva ri kasatyaniṅ rāma" (9v.2–3).

foreshadows the chronological habit of heroic biographies found in the later manuscript traditions.

STYLES OF HISTORICAL EXPLANATION

The panegyric inscriptions discussed above provide only brief summaries of historical events, but more extensive heroic biographies were written in a verse form called *kidung*, narrative poems in syllabic meters in the Middle Javanese language.[18] These heroic biographies were written at various times between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, and they were subsequently transmitted through manuscript copying to the present day. They often focus on figures that are known from the primary source record, such as King Vijaya of Majapahit. The heroes of these biographies are nuanced and flawed characters, in contrast to the perfect and flawless protagonists found in panegyric inscriptions like Pucangan. The choice of historical subject matter is the reason why the Javanese heroic biographies have attracted the close attention, though not the widespread approval, of Western historians since the early nineteenth century.[19]

The heroic biography genre, as articulated in the *kidung* verse form, is defined by a narrative focus on one or a few heroic protagonists, usually in a sophisticated poetic style similar to that of the royal panegyrics and epic poetry. The genre is fully realized in three narrative poems concerning the early history of the royal court at Majapahit, titled *Vijaya and Lawe,*

18. A *kidung* meter is defined by a fixed number of syllables in a line, with a final syllable containing a specific vowel. The *kidung* meters are subdivided into two categories: *tembang* meters and *tengahan* meters. In *tembang* meters, several lines containing different numbers of syllables and different final vowels are combined into a fixed pattern. This pattern defines a stanza in that meter, which is usually demarcated by punctuation. The other category of *kidung* meters is called *tengahan*. The basic unit of *tengahan* meters are pairs of long stanzas whose final syllables contain the same vowel. However, *tengahan* verse structure is made more complicated by the fact that a single canto usually contains an alternating pattern of stanza-pairs of different lengths. Furthermore, each canto usually has two initial stanza-pairs called *kawitan* ("beginning"), which have yet different lengths. Within the stanzas there is a flexible sub-structure, which is sensitively related to the contexts in which poems are recited. Zoetmulder, *Kalangwan*, 101–9; Adrian Vickers, "Kidung Metres and the Interpretation of the Malat," in *Balinese Music in Context: A Sixty-Fifth Birthday Tribute to Hans Oesch* (Amadeus Verlag, 1992), 221–44.

19. T. S. Raffles, *The History of Java*, 2 vols. (London, 1817), 2:101–8; Bade, *Of Palm-Wine, Women, and War*, 81–104.

Harṣavijaya, and *Sorāndaka*. These heroic biographies tend to be more stylistically homogeneous than annals texts and exhibit less diversity of content. On the other hand, they offer richer dramatic potential than annals do. This feature allowed writers in Java not only to produce elaborate historical accounts of past events but also to offer cogent explanations for why they had happened. A central theme of these poems is the interpersonal conflict between heroic characters and the historical repercussions of that conflict. They employ a common style of historical explanation in which events are driven by political and military struggle, which in turn are caused by the failure of individuals to adhere to the moral law (*dharma*) governing their relationships with each other. The characterization of heroes exhibits psychological complexity. While on one level the heroes bear personal responsibility for their moral failures, at a more profound level, their decisions have been preordained by the force of destiny. Historical events are thus explained in terms of the workings of fate, which are concretely realized as a series of moral failures leading to political conflict.

The oldest of the Majapahit heroic biographies is the *Vijaya and Lawe*, which was probably composed in the fifteenth or sixteenth century.[20] The poem focuses on two protagonists, King Vijaya of Majapahit and his disloyal follower Lawe, who were active in the 1290s CE.[21] The first half of the text focuses on Vijaya's rise to power, while the second half focuses on Lawe's rebellion at the beginning of Vijaya's reign. The *Vijaya and Lawe* was probably composed by a single individual at a particular time, but its author is not named in the text. The poet's concern to explain historical events is

20. The *Vijaya and Lawe* is generally believed to date to the early fourteenth century, but it is actually much more recent than this. Louis-Charles Damais used a trial-and-error method to convert the poem's incomplete calendrical elements to the date November 24, 1334, but his result should not be considered definitive. The extant text reflects a tradition that must have developed much later than the early fourteenth century. The poem's depiction of Vijaya's family is at such variance with the official fourteenth-century record that the poem is extremely unlikely to have been circulating as early as 1334 CE, considering that Vijaya's children Gitārja and Wiyat, as well as his widow Gayatrī, ruled the kingdom at that time. It is therefore far more likely that the poem was composed well after the fourteenth century. Louis-Charles Damais, "Études d'épigraphie indonésienne: V. Dates de manuscrits et documents divers de Java, Bali et Lombok," *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 49 (1958): 55–57.

21. *Vijaya and Lawe* is a modern title for this whole text that reflects the equal importance of these two protagonists in each half of the poem. The manuscript tradition gives two different titles to each half: the first half is titled *Pañji Vijayakrama*, while the second half is titled *Rangga Lawe*.

FIGURE 16. Balinese painting of a battle between Lawe and Anabrang as described in the *Vijaya and Lawe* (created late nineteenth century CE). Leiden University Library, Or. 3390: 212. Public domain.

made explicit in an authorial statement at the end of the poem: "The heart is compelled to relate the causes of savage deeds."[22]

The main trigger of the *Vijaya and Lawe*'s plot is conflict within the royal court. This conflict is generated by wrongs done by kings to their followers and conversely by followers to their kings, leading to tragic outcomes. In the poem's first half, the error of the king Kṛtanagara (referred to as Śiva-Buddha in this text) is to spurn the wise advice of his chief minister, Rāganātha. This allows unscrupulous yes-men to gain influence over the king and ultimately leads to his downfall. In the second half, the error of the new king Vijaya is to sideline Lawe, a popular but prideful leader, which exacerbates personal rivalries among the ministers and leads to civil war. The fault of the kings' subjects is to allow their resentments to drive them to treason. Vīrarāja's

22. "Tvas kədvānali mar|maniṅulah mūrka" (13.11a–b) (Middle Javanese). Quoted from the edition by C. C. Berg, *Rangga Lawe: Middeljavaansche Historische Roman* (Albrecht & Co., 1930), 177.

bitterness at being posted to distant Madura leads him to conspire against King Śiva-Buddha, and similarly, Lawe's dissatisfaction at the elevation of his rival Nambi leads him to open rebellion.

The *Vijaya and Lawe* presents a particular type of explanation for events: it depicts the political mistakes of leaders as a failure to adhere to moral law. At first glance, this construal seems to foreground the agency of individuals, but in fact, the moral failure of individuals is a realization of their destiny. No clear distinction is drawn between free will and fate. The propensity of individuals to do wrong, and the consequences of those wrongs, are karmically predetermined. This logic is illustrated in the final conversation between King Vijaya and Vīrarāja, father of the defeated rebel Lawe:

> All huddling together, the two [Vīrarāja and his grandson] made obeisance and wept. "Your Majesty, what is the point in me, Dhikāra, paying homage to you? The one who was destroyed by foolishness and disgrace, I acknowledge as my son [Lawe]. He neglected proper conduct and was selfish in his desires, which brought about great destruction. Now both of your Majesty's servants offer up their lives. What else can we do now? It has simply come to pass. It is clear that I failed to impart moral teachings to my son. Indeed, it seemed to come to nothing, which was the cause of death." But the king replied; fearful, pained, and in tears, he stretched out his arms and embraced the two: "Oh father Vīrarāja, do not go on any longer, for it was a disaster of fate. My punishment is equally great. I failed in the law of brotherhood. Then came what is called death; what was hoped for is lost, along with happiness."[23]

Both Vijaya and Lawe failed in their obligations to each other, which the king describes as the "law of brotherhood" (*sānakdharma*), and this failure is understood to have been predetermined by fate.

The second poem, *Harṣavijaya*, is a heroic biography with a similar narrative scope to the first part of the *Vijaya and Lawe*. It tells of Vijaya's rise to power but shows several important differences from the accounts given in the *Vijaya and Lawe*. The poem, which likewise does not identify its author,

23. "Sarvy aṅaras pādānəmbah | ature karorvan taṅis | susuhunan mapa don | səmbahipun dhikāreki | naviteṅ patik aji | kaṅ vus śīrṇa deniṅ puṅguṅ | caṇḍāleṅaku putra | tam patutur kramayukti | aṅkāreṅ hyun | dady avətu yātibhraṣṭa ‖ maṅke patik prameśvara | kalih atur jīva pati | vənaṅkinapakən maṅko | pan kalintaṅ-lintaṅugi | kavas tan drəmana riṅ | atutur rahasyeṅ sūnu | iyānəṅguh dadi no|ra kāraṇānəmu pati | ndan saṅ prabhu | rəs asahur saha vāṣpa ‖ tur asidəhan bāhu saṅ | kaprihan aməkul kalih | lah bapa vīrarāja a|ja denyāndadava manih | pan vus saṅsāreṅ vidhi | aguṅkapo ḍaṇḍaniṅsun | tan tulus sānakdharma | təka ta nama papati | nir taṅ kahyun | karona saha pamuktya" (12.22–24) (Middle Javanese). Quoted from the edition by Berg, *Rangga Lawe*, 175.

was probably composed sometime in the seventeenth century.[24] The central theme of the *Harṣavijaya* is accepting one's fate and the impossibility of altering one's predetermined course.[25] The poem's characters are fully aware that their decisions are controlled by destiny. Historical events are set in motion by human actions, such as the machinations of Vīrarāja to depose Jayakatwang in order to install Vijaya as king of Java. Jayakatwang tells his son Virondaya that fate has decreed who will die and who will survive in the coming war: "Oh my son, I do not know how things will turn out, and the same goes for you, my dear. We do not determine what happens but follow the decree of fate. Even if we plunge into the sea or into fire, we will not die unless we have been abandoned by holy fate. So it is with the prince. If there is any trace [in him] of the one who died before [namely, the previous king Narasiṁha], how can he die? I myself will end up installing him as king."[26] Fate causes events, despite individuals' attempts to take control of their own paths. On numerous occasions, Jayakatwang is shown to have foreknowledge of his ultimate defeat by Vijaya, but he takes no steps to avert it, because he understands that he cannot change his lot.[27] The force of destiny is manifested in many ways that may lead to good or bad outcomes: "The nature of being human is that no one can be perfectly fortunate, but [everyone is] pursued by happiness and suffering."[28] All human actions and experiences are therefore mere manifestations of the fated course of history.

24. This estimate is based on a statement in the poem's closing stanza: "It would take forever to tell the story; the whole beauty of it is contained in the prose story *Pararaton*" ("Taṅeh yan kathakəna sararasira muṅgva iṅ carita *Pararaton*," 6.119). If this is an authentic reference to the extant *Pararaton* chronicle as it is known today, then the composition of the *Harṣavijaya* likely post-dates the earliest known use of the title *Pararaton* in 1613 CE. The oldest colophon of the *Harṣavijaya* is dated September 20, 1743, which serves as a *terminus ante quem* for the composition of the poem. C. C. Berg, "Kidung Harṣa-Wijaya: Middeljavaansche Historische Roman," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch Indië* 88 (1931): 178.

25. Stuart Robson, "The Force of Destiny, or the Kidung Harsa-Wijaya Reread," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 28 (2000): 248–52.

26. "Aduh anak isun kaki tan vruh iṅ laku kapo sira masku tan makareh iṅ dadi anut titahniṅ vidhi yadyan luməbur jroniṅ pasir agni tan hantu yan tan sinurud deniṅ hyaṅ vidhi samaṅkana sira tvan mantri yan hana vuryan iṅ saṅ mokṣeṅ daṅu | masa sirātəmah pati əmben isun aṅadəgakən ratu sira tvan mantri" (1.84a–b) (Middle Javanese). Quoted from the edition of Berg, "Harṣa-Wijaya," 64.

27. Robson, "The Force of Destiny," 249.

28. "Kramaniṅ andadi voṅ nora hana amūrṇa anulus tinut deniṅ sukhaduḥkha" (1.28b) (Middle Javanese). Quoted from the edition by Berg, "Harṣa-Wijaya," 54.

The third poem, *Sorāndaka*, is a heroic biography focused on the deaths of Sora and Nambi, two followers of Vijaya who played significant roles in early Majapahit politics.[29] It may have been composed in 1754 CE, based on what is probably a chronogram embedded in the first line, but its basic plot was likely already circulating in the sixteenth century.[30] The *Sorāndaka* serves as a sequel to the *Vijaya and Lawe*, as it picks up the story of Vijaya's reign in the aftermath of Lawe's rebellion. Vijaya is characterized as a poor leader who is easily manipulated by his cunning adviser Mahāpati into alienating his former comrades Lawe, Sora, and Nambi. The *Sorāndaka* continues after the death of Sora to narrate in detail the rebellion of the former chief minister Nambi against Majapahit authority. The *Sorāndaka* employs a similar line of historical reasoning to the *Vijaya and Lawe* and the *Harṣavijaya*, but with a greater emphasis on the king's weaknesses of leadership. The reasoning is as follows: judicious royal authority in accordance with moral law brings about the country's welfare, while a leader's failure to control their passions causes disaster. This failure is often attributed to a monarch's neglect of political treatises, which in turn is understood to be the inevitable outcome of fate. In the *Sorāndaka*, the working of fate is couched in the idiom of the Age of Strife (Kaliyuga), the last and worst of the four ages of Indic tradition:

> Danger came, as had been ordained by fate. The king seemed to forget to strive for the welfare of the realm. He came to hold fast to Strife, which heralded the destruction of the ministers.[31]

> The ascetics now realized the king's desire, and that he had been possessed by Strife, which caused him to waver in his adherence to the precepts.[32]

29. The *Sorāndaka* has never been published in full, with all printed editions covering only the first three of the poem's ten cantos. The quotations used here are drawn from a direct reading of the palm-leaf manuscript V/812 at the Kirtya library in Singaraja, north Bali.

30. This line is "Stirring the feelings of the group of scholars, the moon-god was full in the sky's zenith" ("Amrih rasa paṇḍitagaṇa hyaṅ candra | pūrṇānaṅah iṅ vyati," 1.1) (Middle Javanese). Interpreted as a chronogram, the phrase "feelings–scholars–groups–god" (*rasa–paṇḍita–gaṇa–hyaṅ*) corresponds to 1676 Śaka (1754 CE). A summary of the story of Nambi's rebellion is found in the *Pararaton*, which had gained its fixed form in the sixteenth century.

31. "Bhaya paṅuñcaṅ iṅ vidhivaśa təka | mogha śrī narapati | arūpa kalepyan | amrih tṛptiniṅ rājya | dadya aṅgugoni kali | majarakəna | ruganiṅ para mantrī" (1.10) (Middle Javanese). In these contexts, the term *kali* is best interpreted as an abstraction of strife itself. Importantly, this figure is unconnected to the goddess Kālī. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English dictionary*, s.v. "kali."

32. "Saṅ yati vus vruh ri iṣṭi śrī narendra | yan kasusukan kali | dadya tan vastitya | aṅgəgvani śāsana" (1.39) (Middle Javanese).

Vijaya's fault lies not only in his neglect of the political treatises but also in his foolish dependence on his evil adviser, Mahāpati. As in the *Vijaya and Lawe*, the plot of the *Sorāndaka* is driven by dysfunctional relationships between the king and his subordinates. These are exploited by Mahāpati to incite a series of rebellions against the royal authority. Vijaya fails to recognize his error until it is too late. The king's fault is exposed in an extraordinary scene where an emissary admonishes him in public: "Perhaps your Majesty wishes to study proper conduct. The reason this happened is that your Majesty has been lied to and has always paid heed to Mahāpati, that slanderer unfit for royal service, who caused such damage to the state that the ministers ended up paying with their lives. Perhaps your Majesty was deceived in the past, causing the deaths of Lord Wenang [namely, Lawe] and of Lord Sora. Silence is the speech of kings who do not study the precepts of conduct for subordinates and superiors."[33]

The *Sorāndaka* thus exhibits the characteristic style of historical explanation found in other heroic biographies from Java: historical events are driven by conflict, which arises from failure to adhere to moral law. These events bring about an age of strife that is preordained by fate. This style of explanation offers a specific way of addressing historical questions, such as Why did Vijaya become king? or Why did Lawe rebel? It is therefore not only a literary effect but also a genuine kind of historical reasoning. Through these examples of heroic biography, we can see how the literary conventions of the genre shaped the ways their authors and audience made sense of historical events.

THE HEROIC IN LITERARY ART

Heroic biographies from Java are both historical and literary works. In many premodern cultures, there was no conceptual tension between the writing of history and of literature. This contrasts with European theory, in which history is frequently defined in opposition to the literary arts. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle maintained that history makes assertions about

33. "Pilih bhaṭārāhyun | marīkṣeṅ laku yukti ‖ nimittanya Pāduka Bhaṭāra sata|ta kempəra misiṅgih | tur Māpati kaṅ voṅ va|vadulan tan hogya pa|rəkən aṅave rūganiṅ | nāgari paran | təmahnya mantri akyāṅəmasin ‖ manava Pāduka Bhaṭāra karya | kempəra riṅ kunā maṅde | raṅga Vənaṅ mati | lan pun dəmaṅ Sora mona | pocapeṅ para prabhu tan marīkṣeṅ| gatiśāsananiṅ vvaṅ sor kalāvan siṅgih" (8.20–22) (Middle Javanese).

particular things that happened in fact, while poetry illustrates universal "kinds of things that happen" in general.[34] This is consistent with a widespread view in mainstream literary theory that poetic expression is incompatible with historical writing, which is instead characterized by a plain, prosaic, and sober style. The theoretical opposition between history and literature has persisted even in modern scholarship.[35]

There is no evidence that people in premodern Java thought of history and literature in such oppositional terms. The writers who composed heroic biographies presented themselves as recasting an existing true story into a new poetic form. Poetic verse was in no way felt to be less appropriate than plain prose for the telling of historical narratives. Likewise, a commitment to literary artistry implied no corresponding lack of interest in historical truth. Rather than a dichotomy between historical and literary genres, people in premodern Java possessed a range of textual options for narrating the past. The Majapahit heroic biographies show a keen awareness of the standard tropes and concepts of the prevailing poetic traditions. Alongside the heroic biography genre, there emerged in late premodern Java a closely related genre of poetry that is often called "courtly romance." These courtly romances focus on a legendary figure called Panji and his adventures through the Javanese realm in search of a princess. The Panji courtly romances had a tremendous influence on many other Southeast Asian cultures, and they were adapted and reinterpreted far beyond their original Javanese literary context.[36] While the setting of the courtly romance genre derives from the political geography of eastern Java during the twelfth century, it has proven impossible to convincingly relate the content of courtly romances to the primary source record of this period. Though heroic biographies have different thematic concerns from the courtly romances, they share many

34. David Gallop, "'Poetry' Versus 'History' in Aristotle's Poetics," *Philosophy and Literature* 42 (2018): 420–33.

35. An illustrative example of this is the way in which many professional historians in the 1970s and 1980s criticized the work of the theorist Hayden White, on the grounds of his supposedly blurring the distinction between history and literature. See also the thoughtful discussion of this thorny issue by Mark Donnelly and Claire Norton. Vann, "Reception of Hayden White"; Donnelly and Norton, *Doing History*, 81–98.

36. W. H. Rassers, *Pañji, the Culture Hero: A Structural Study of Religion in Java* (Martinus Nijhoff, 1959); Stuart Robson, ed. and trans., *Wangbang Wideya: A Javanese Pañji Romance*, Bibliotheca Indonesica 6 (Martinus Nijhoff, 1971); Adrian Vickers, *Journeys of Desire: A Study of the Balinese Text Malat*, Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde 217 (KITLV Press, 2005); Kieven, *Following the Cap-Figure*.

similarities of language, meter, and style. Certain heroic biographies of historical kings, such as the *Harṣavijaya*, display the strong influence of the Panji courtly romances.

The *Vijaya and Lawe*, the *Harṣavijaya*, and the *Sorāndaka* all self-consciously claim a place in the literary traditions of Java, which go back to the *kāvya*-inspired royal panegyric inscriptions of the eighth century and earlier. The poetic expressiveness of the later heroic biographies have no bearing on their status and value as historiography. These works show the same commitment to sophisticated literary composition as the royal panegyrics, such as the Pucangan and Sukhāmṛta inscriptions, whose historical reliability is widely accepted. Heroic biographies were considered by their authors to be self-contained wholes. This unity is indicated by the special opening and closing stanzas that bookend the narratives, which are written in the poet's own voice in a similar style to the opening benedictions in *kakawin* epic poems.[37] The conventional Old Javanese images of natural beauty and mystic union are employed in these poems for the narration of historical events.

The *Vijaya and Lawe* opens with a stanza describing the poet's distressed state of mind when beginning to write the poem, couched in conventional language, followed by a date: "The story is versified in the meter Durma, accompanied by the *caṇṭung* [a kind of musical instrument].[38] Shaping it unsuccessfully, afflicted by pain, bewildered, dwelling in grief, with distress overwhelming a perplexed mind, the poet began to compose on the solar day Śiva Thursday, [in the week] Merakih, in the fifth [month], on the thirteenth lunar day of the waning half of the month."[39] This opening stanza presents the poem as the work of a single author writing at a precise time. The phrase "to compose poetry" implies the creative responsibility of an individual poet (*kavi*). This authorial stance differs considerably from the multiple authorship and multi-stage compilation process of annals texts like the *Pararaton*. The impression that the *Vijaya and Lawe* was composed by a single person at

37. Zoetmulder, *Kalangwan*, 173–85.

38. In his dictionary entry for *caṇṭung*, Zoetmulder includes a suggestion by Jaap Kunst describing it as being similar to a lute. Zoetmulder, *Old Javanese–English Dictionary*, s.v. "caṇṭung."

39. "Durmitta tinambaṅ kathācacantuṅan | mimba tan pantuk gati | kasurugan lara | viraṅrvaṅ arantunan | viyoga tībrānaputi | manah prapañca | tambayaneṅ aṅavi ‖ vve Śiva Vraspatīka Mrakeṅ kalima | Viṣṇvartha trayodaśī (1.1–2) (Middle Javanese). Quoted from the edition of Berg, *Rangga Lawe*, 35.

a particular time, or at least presents itself as such, is confirmed by the closing stanzas, which are also in the poet's voice:

> The state of the countryside was in tatters, just like a song whose structure is clumsy and ignorant, for it does not conform to the rhythms laid out in the excellent treatises, focused only on merging and becoming one with the poet completely, just like the heavenly bodies brought forth by the moon, perfect beyond compare. That is the reason why the heart is compelled to relate the causes of savage deeds, that it crosses the river, forgets its place, and is not ashamed to be considered arrogant. Scrutinize the story, which has a concrete visible form like a betel nut. Let the ultimate conclusion not bring about strife in the heart.[40]

This closing passage includes the conventional protestation of the poet's lack of technical skill that is found throughout Old Javanese literature.[41] The language of mystic union, expressed in the terms "merging and becoming one" is a central feature of the *kakawin* genre of poetry. The author of the *Vijaya and Lawe* thus locates the poem squarely within its prevailing literary context.

The *Harṣavijaya* opens with a reflexive statement in the poet's voice, which pays homage to the poet's tutelary god: "Pure in desire, praised in poetry, residing in the center of the lotus, constant and truthful, being the soul of the one who has perfected the accomplishment of the poet who writes the charm of beauty. Truly you are bathed by the mist of the fourth month, the seed and the bud of the jasmine, and the pollen of the pandanus flower are fragrant incense, and the humming of bees in the pollen is a beautiful song of praise, soft and slow."[42] The image of the heart-lotus alludes to a mystical concept found throughout Old Javanese poetry.[43] The poetic form of the *Harṣavijaya*

40. "Vastu n alilu thānīṅ rat | akən gīta tata kikuk apiṅgiṅ | kalud tan iluheṅ pupuh | parpat iṅ tatvādhika | amuṅ amor | amiśreṅ saṅ kavi huvus | lvir jyuti kumavvateṅ śa|śi sapūrṇa tan pasiriṅ ‖ vetniṅ tvas kədvānali mar|maniṅ ulah mūrka pārageṅ kālī | laṅguk tan iraṅ sinaṅguh | cəṅgāmivekā kathā | vastu tinon | lwir amucaṅ karika pūr|vaniṅ tulus tan paveh baṅ|kit kasusukraneṅ ati" (13.10–11) (Middle Javanese). Quoted from the edition of Berg, *Rangga Lawe*, 176–177.

41. Zoetmulder, *Kalangwan*, 164.

42. "Śuddhaniṅ hyun pinuji kavya umuṅgu iṅ sāri kamala sthiti ajati makajīvaniṅ saṅ sampun parārtha putus iṅ kavi aṅavi rūmniṅ kalaṅon, tuhun dinyusan deniṅ rərəbniṅ kacatur vīja kuduniṅ malaṭi rəbuk iṅ puḍak dhūpa arum paṅhraṅniṅ bhramara iṅ sāri ya stuti marum hrit alon" (1.1) (Middle Javanese). Quoted from the edition of Berg, "Harṣawijaya," 49.

43. Zoetmulder, *Kalangwan*, 183.

implies a coherent act of composition, just like the *Vijaya and Lawe*. The key term here is also *kavi*, which implies poetic invention that occurs over a short span of time and is conducted by individual poets, rather than a lengthy process of collective composition in the manner of the *Pararaton*.

The final stanza of the *Harṣavijaya* provides some specific information about the conventional landscapes associated with poetic composition, and the names of various genres of poetry: "Roaming around, composing poetry, wandering about in the pleasure of the coasts and mountains, the beaches and estuaries, the beauty of remote hermitages that are sung of and recited in *bhāṣa, gurit, kidung*, and *pralapita* in folded books, which captivate the hearts of the poets who read them aloud. Oh! Truly the achievement of the royal poets deserves the status of master poet."[44] Here the poet has given a list of Old Javanese poetic genres: *bhāṣa* are short poems written in quantitative meters, *gurit* is a general word for a poem, *kidung* refers in this context to poems in syllabic meters, while *pralapita* is a rare term for a poem in quantitative meters. The first half of this closing stanza describes the activities of poets who are enraptured by the feeling of *kalangwan*, a unique aesthetic concept that captures feelings of rapture, intoxication, and delight in beauty.[45] The pleasures of nature are expressed by the composition of poetry in its multitude of forms. Ultimately, *kalangwan* is the experience of mystic union with the divine, achieved by means of poetic composition as a form of yoga. Scholarly discussions of *kalangwan* have focused almost exclusively on *kakawin* poetry written in quantitative meters, but these examples show that *kidung* poetry also partook of this conception of literary creation. That the story itself pertains to historical events in Java during the early 1290s CE, rather than being based on Sanskrit epic traditions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, made it no less appropriate as a subject for elaborate poetry in the literary traditions of premodern Java.

Even as late as the eighteenth century, heroic biographies continued to be shaped by this literary sensibility centered on *kalangwan*. The *Sorāndaka*

44. "Mahas amarṇa gurit aṅlaṅlaṅ raśminiṅ pasir vukir mvaṅ taṅ pasir hulusan laṅāniṅ asrama simpar vinakta iṅ bhāṣa gurit kiduṅ pralapita umuṅgv iṅ ləpihan aṅrahati tvasniṅ kavi amaca ḍuh tuhu kīrtiniṅ prabhukavi yogya ṅgvan iṅ kavīśvara" (6.119a) (Middle Javanese). Quoted from the edition by Berg, "Harṣa-wijaya," 178.

45. The base word *langə* has cognates in a wide range of Malayo-Polynesian languages, denoting feelings of drunkenness, seasickness, or vertigo. However, the aesthetic and mystical connotations found here seem to be a distinctive feature of the Javanese language. Robert Blust, Stephen Trussel, and Alexander D. Smith, "The Austronesian Comparative Dictionary Online" (2023), s.v. "laŋu," https://acd.clld.org.

describes at length "the habits of the poet," who seeks to be entranced by the beauty of nature. This imagined ideal poet climbs a moonlit mountain path in the early hours of the morning. The author is "compelled to imitate the poet" by putting the story of Sora in verse:

> The holy moon stirs the hearts of all the scholars, full in the sky's zenith, rumbling gently. As if summoning beauty, the vines and trees stretch out and blossom, and the bees are carefree, throwing the flowers on the mountain into disarray. An auspicious night in the month of Kārttika, the joy of the world that gladdens the poet's heart, giving form to beauty that is revealed in a flash of lightning. The tips of tendrils are swaying, as if encouraging passers-by and pointing the way. One sets off with the moonlight for a torch, sheltered by the fragrant shoots and spreading flowers, striding forth unhampered, heading for the forbidding places, carrying a writing board with a sharpened pencil tucked behind the ear, taking no account of the steepness and difficulty of the path, the many rough and stony chasms blocking the way, the many byways off the track, the fierce wild tigers lying in wait, and the mighty snakes with their burning venom. Traveling up the steep road, one reaches a hermitage, beholding it happily, just visible when the sun rises above the hilltops, shining and illuminating the earth. All these are the habits of the poet who seeks beauty, wandering entranced by the coasts and the mountains that are sung about in verse, the oneness of beauty made manifold in poetry, in which the feeling of death dwells secretly, adorned by bunches of fragrant blossoms. Because of my desire to tell the story, I will resolve to take after the poets, urged by duty, but I am far from being able to arouse passion in the heart.[46]

These stanzas draw heavily on the conventional imagery of Old Javanese poetry. They elaborate on the spiritual conception of *kalangwan* which Zoetmulder described "that beauty, appearing in various ways, [which] is

46. "Amrih rasa paṇḍitagaṇa hyaṅ candra | pūrṇānəṅah iṅ vyati | gərəh mandra-mandra | lvir aṅatag kalaṅvan | latavṛkṣāñjrah asāri | kumbaṅ tan kepvan | aṅrurah puṣpeṅ vukir ‖ amṛtamāseṅ Kārttika sukhaniṅ rat | avijah tvas iṅ kavi | amarṇaṅ kalaṅvan | kinəḍapan iṅ kilat | lvir aṅgyakəna lumaris | atuduh marga | molah luṅniṅ śikhari ‖ lumaku asuluh-suluh pajaṅ vulan | apayuṅ paḍapāmrik | saha kusumāñjrah | tan kevədan lumampah | aṅuṅsi maraṅ apiṅit | asaṅvākaras | asumpaṅ tanah siṅi ‖ tan ketaṅ səṅka durgamanikaṅ marga | kveh aṅalaṅ iṅ margi juraṅ trəbis uṅkal | kveh pasimpaṅ iṅ marga | moṅ krura agalak aṅavit mvaṅ sarpa abhiṣa | viṣānya aṅəbusi ‖ livat iṅ mārgasəṅka amaṅgiḥ pājaran | līlāṅuṅaṅ sakaakṣi | ri vijil iṅ arka | ri agraniṅ parvata | kumənar nələhi bhūmi | maṅka svabhāva | saṅ kavi andon raśmin ‖ aṅlaṅlaṅ kalaṅən iṅ pasir parvata | vinakteṅ bhāṣāgurit | parokniṅ kalaṅvan | dinviṣṭha iṅ bhāṣāgīta | sinūkṣma iṅ rasa kapatin | rinəṅganira asaṅcāyaniṅ puṣpāmrik ‖ don iṅsun āpti amārṇa-marṇaṅ kathā | pakṣā tumirva kavi | pinupurān dharma | ndan dūran yan kavaśa amaṅun aṅrəs iṅ hati" (1.1–7) (Middle Javanese).

always seen as a manifestation of the Absolute."[47] The *Sorāndaka* explicitly develops this monistic idea through the phrase "the oneness of beauty made manifold in poetry." This elaborate example confirms that the historical story of Vijaya's reign was considered to be an entirely suitable subject for refined poetic expression.

In premodern Java, history and poetry were not mutually exclusive categories. Rather, historical knowledge was understood as a body of narrative content that could be expressed in a range of poetic and literary forms. The heroic biography genre provided specific forms of expression for historical subject matter, such as the life of King Vijaya of Majapahit, which was judged to be worthy of high poetry. The authors of these heroic biographies had the same creative process as the composers of epic *kakawin* poetry, centered on the aesthetic principle of *kalangwan*. This shows that the theoretical dichotomy of historical and literary modes of expression is not applicable to Java. This should prompt us to reconsider its usefulness in other premodern contexts around the world.

HEROIC BIOGRAPHIES AS HISTORY

People have long told stories about the past in terms of heroes. The heroic biography genre provides a distinctive perspective on history, a particular style of historical explanation, and specific techniques for casting historical knowledge in literary forms. The genre is especially relevant to the concerns of certain types of people: monarchs, aristocrats, warriors, and state officials. It is therefore unsurprising to find that heroic biographies emerged in contexts where such people played an influential role as patrons or subjects of historical writing. Carlyle's theory of history as the biography of great men is not in favor with historians today, but similar notions have played an important role in historical practice around the world. The lives of heroic leaders, from Alexander the Great to Alexander Hamilton, can be a powerful framework for people to understand their past. Professional historians' skepticism toward heroic biographies stems from certain features of the genre: its idealized depiction of heroes with sometimes superhuman qualities, its lack of engagement with the primary source record, its style of historical explanation that foregrounds individual personalities and relationships instead of

47. Zoetmulder, *Kalangwan*, 214.

collective social forces, and its literary characteristics that uncannily resemble those of fiction, romance, and legend. Such skepticism may be warranted, but we should not too hastily dismiss the heroic biographies as being altogether divorced from genuine historical practice.

People in places like premodern Java considered heroic biographies to be literary retellings of historically accurate stories. Their authors saw themselves as recasting true stories about the past in an artistic form. Indeed, these biographies often contain valuable historical information that cannot be obtained by other means. They depict real people and events in extravagant terms, sometimes exceeding the limits of plausibility or contradicting what is known from the available primary sources. Nevertheless, the stories told in these heroic biographies derive from authentic historical traditions. Even when the heroic biographies deviate from what can be verified from other documents, we should not therefore conclude that the whole genre is intrinsically unhistorical. These poems are the product of a bona fide kind of historical practice, which we can only properly interpret once we better understand the textual conditions that shaped them.

FIVE

How Traditions Vary

PEOPLE THE WORLD OVER HAVE PLACED GREAT STORE in remembering the past and passing on their knowledge to future generations. One of the most effective ways to transmit historical knowledge is through tradition. Historical traditions allow a community to maintain knowledge of the past for centuries or even millennia, long after the original traces of an event have disappeared. Traditions can have wide reach and remarkable accuracy over long periods of time. Many people learn about the past through traditions rather than from their own investigation of records and archives. The formation and evolution of historical traditions is therefore an essential component of understanding how different communities comprehend their own pasts.

This chapter begins by investigating how historical traditions are formed over time. A tradition consists of multiple expressions of knowledge that are separated in time and space. As time goes on, traditions naturally undergo change—chronologies are altered, genealogies are modified, and narrative episodes are rearranged. Variation within a historical tradition is generated by its modes of transmission, so that different modes lead to different kinds of variation. Eventually, these variations evolve into contradictory versions of the same events, a crucial but little-recognized process that historical traditions undergo. The chapter goes on to argue that such contradictions emerge naturally out of the processes of textual transmission rather than from disregard for historical truth or deliberate fictionalization of the past. Historians often find it challenging to use traditions as evidence for their research, precisely because of how much dynamic change they undergo over time.

The chapter's examples derive from the Majapahit royal tradition, a body of historical knowledge about the powerful kingdom of Majapahit that flourished in eastern Java during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Contradictory versions of events within the Majapahit royal tradition emerged due to the specific textual modes through which the tradition was transmitted. Chronological variations occurred because of the way chronicles were compiled, genealogical changes because of the oral-mnemonic transmission of stories, and episodic rearrangements because of the demands of performance formats. As information was lost during these processes of transmission, various restorative tactics exacerbated the contradictions between different versions. The case study of the Majapahit royal tradition shows how textual transmission is a major driver of variation within historical traditions in general. This compels us to rethink how we can better use and interpret these traditions in our own historical study.

THE FORMATION OF TRADITION

Many people encounter the past through historical traditions. Knowledge of the past is transmitted between members of successive generations within a community, and in doing so, it forms a historical tradition. There are many different ways of forming a historical tradition through the transmission of collective knowledge, such as manuscript copying, oral storytelling from memory, and performing narrative theatre. The modes of transmission characterize the kind of tradition that is formed. For example, an oral-mnemonic tradition is built up of many occasions of a story spoken from memory, then being remembered by listeners, before being retold by them on later occasions. Similarly, a manuscript tradition consists of a series of inscribed artifacts of different ages, linked by the fact that the contents of each one is copied from another.

The significance of historical tradition in premodern contexts contrasts markedly with the priorities of the modern discipline of history. Professional historians tend to privilege one particular kind of evidence of the past: written records in their original physical form, which were produced close in time and place to the events they pertain to. This privilege is reflected in the label "primary source" that is applied to such evidence. Historians often consider primary sources to have a more immediate connection to past reality than other kinds of evidence, such as decades-old recollections or accounts written long after the fact. By contrast, premodern communities generally relied more on traditional knowledge than on evidence preserved in original written artifacts. We therefore need to investigate the consequences of this widespread reliance on tradition on the historical practices of the premodern world.

Historical traditions are often recorded in manuscripts, whose contents can be transmitted by copying them into other manuscripts. Through repeated copying from old manuscripts to new ones, a text can outlive its original physical form by many centuries, forming an enduring tradition that consists of an extended series of short-lived artifacts. It is through such manuscript traditions that the vast majority of the world's ancient texts have survived to the present day.[1] For example, the Old Javanese vernacular adaptation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* was composed between the mid-ninth and early tenth centuries CE, but its best surviving manuscript copies were produced in Bali up to a thousand years later.[2] This example shows that through the repeated copying of old manuscripts into new ones, textual stability can be reliably maintained for over a millennium. Multiple copies can be made from a single source, further increasing the chances of the text's survival in precarious conditions.

Repeated acts of copying a text produce variation among its manuscripts. One of the main tasks of textual criticism is the identification and management of variants that emerge in manuscript transmission. These variations may include repetition, omission, interpolation, substitution, reordering, and restructuring of text segments at any scale.[3] In the context of premodern Java, there is a strong correlation between the genre of a transmitted text and the types of variation that it undergoes in manuscript transmission. Epic poems in verse (*kakawin*) and prose (*parwa*) tend to exhibit relatively limited variation in their transmission, while other genres show more variation, such as the poems in *kidung* verse meters concerning the romantic hero Panji.[4]

1. Recent scholarship on ancient manuscript traditions identifies loss and variation as crucial issues in many premodern Eurasian contexts. Adam Gacek, *The Arabic Manuscript Tradition: A Glossary of Technical Terms and Bibliography*, Handbuch der Orientalistik 58 (Brill, 2001); L. D. Reynolds and N. G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature*, 4th ed. (Oxford University Press, 2013); Vincenzo Vergiani, Daniele Cuneo, and Camillo Alessio Formigatti, eds., *Indic Manuscript Cultures through the Ages: Material, Textual, and Historical Investigations*, Studies in Manuscript Cultures 14 (De Gruyter, 2017); Christopher M. B. Nugent, "Manuscript Culture," in *The Oxford Handbook of Classical Chinese Literature*, edited by Wiebke Denecke, Wai-Yee Li, and Xiaofei Tian (Oxford University Press, 2017).

2. H. Kern, *Rāmāyaṇa: The Story of Rāma and Sītā in Old Javanese*, edited by Willem van der Molen, Javanese Studies 1 (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2015), xxiii–xxiv.

3. The most comprehensive analysis of multiscalar variation within a textual tradition from Java is Tim Behrend's study of the early modern *Jatiswara*. Behrend, "Serat Jatiswara."

4. Zoetmulder, *Kalangwan*, 64; Vickers, *Journeys of Desire*, 83–90.

The oral-mnemonic mode of communication is another important way to pass down historical knowledge from one generation to another. As discussed in chapter 1, the oral-mnemonic mode of textual transmission involves a series of occasions in which stories are told orally, then are remembered by listeners to be retold on a later occasion. Over time, the historical knowledge passed down in these occasions of speech develop into very long-lived traditions, such as the extraordinarily ancient oral-mnemonic traditions of some Indigenous Australian communities.[5]

In premodern Java, historical tradition was accorded great authority, and its accuracy was rarely questioned. The *Deśavarṇana* describes how in response to Prapañca's inquiries, the abbot Ratnāṁśa expresses a deep reverence for tradition, and worries about the consequences of making mistakes in his recounting:

> Pardon me as I relate it straight away.
> I shall purify my mind with the seven holy waters.
> Hail to thee, Mountain Lord, and homage to the deity.
> Let no disaster occur as I speak.
> Let your mind be forgiving as you listen, lord of poets.
> Perhaps many people who hear this will be misled,
> But if you should rely on this old man's knowledge,
> It may be lacking or redundant; please do not condemn it.[6]

What Ratnāṁśa is saying here is that any errors in his report are due to his own failings, not that the tradition itself may be false. He uses the conventional self-deprecating formula of Old Javanese authors, asking his listeners to be "forgiving" of his "old man's knowledge," which may be "lacking or redundant." Ratnāṁśa is concerned that many listeners, including Prapañca, may not benefit if they rely on his own flawed understanding of history. He therefore asks for leniency, not only from his listener Prapañca but more importantly from the deified ancestors whose lives he is about to narrate.

5. Patrick D. Nunn and Nicholas J. Reid, "Aboriginal Memories of Inundation of the Australian Coast Dating from More Than 7000 Years Ago," *Australian Geographer* (2015): 1–37; Duane Hamacher et al., "The Archaeology of Orality: Dating Tasmanian Aboriginal Oral Traditions to the Late Pleistocene," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 159 (2023): 105819.

6. "Nda saṅtabya teki ṅhulun mājarosən | maśūcya vvay iṅ saptatīrthe śvacittā | namas te girīndrāya sambah ri saṅ hyaṅ | ndatan dadya kotpāta teki m paśabda ‖ kṣamātah manah saṅ kavīndrān rumaṅvā | ikaṅ vvaṅ rəṅə sugyan akveha mithyā | ndan aṅgəgvane jñāna saṅ vr̥ddha tekā | pilih nyūna sugyādhikā tan calana" (39.2–3) (Old Javanese). See the published edition in Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th Century*, 1:30.

After reproducing the information that Ratnāṁśa gives him, Prapañca duly affirms his trust in its accuracy: "The old man's words were true."[7]

Knowledge of powerful ancestors and forebears was passed down through historical traditions that were deeply embedded in the landscape. Elsewhere in the *Deśavarṇana* (68.4), Prapañca associates a story of the activities of the eleventh-century sage Bharāḍa with the Kamal Pandak site where a shrine to the king's grandmother was being built: "Here at the tamarind tree, the ascetic took rest [coming down] from the sky; there in the district of Palungan the water-pot was placed, as is known throughout the world."[8] Prapañca affirms the accuracy of the story connected to this locality: "This is the true story of the tamarind tree, known through an unwavering tradition."[9] The explicit locative indicators "here" and "there" show how geographical reference was used to consolidate and orientate the historical tradition.

The concern for accurately reporting historical tradition is related to the veneration of ancestors. After conveying Ratnāṁśa's report, Prapañca explains that belief in historical tradition strengthens people's devotion to the ancestors, who in turn bless the living in material and spiritual ways: "People who hear the story of the kings, look! If their hearts are content, then their devotion increases; clearly their sinful deeds cease to have power; suffering, illness, and all the rest are clearly overcome."[10] The moral imperative to respect traditional knowledge is directly linked to the wellbeing of society. According to Prapañca, respect for tradition encourages the living to venerate the dead, which nullifies the effect of the descendants' sins and hence eliminates their suffering. On the other hand, if the living fail to properly honor their ancestors, such as by doubting the historical traditions about their lives, then the dead may withdraw their protection. Those who were powerful in life, such as members of the royal family, are particularly potent and deserving of veneration. For example, after describing a deification ceremony for the king's deceased grandmother, Prapañca writes, "May

7. "Tuhūjarni sang vṛddha" (49.5b) (Old Javanese). Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th Century*, 1:36.

8. "Ṅkai riṅ tiktikivṛkṣa rakva sutapāraryan saṅkeṅ ambara | nāṅ deśeṅ Paluṅan pasalahan kuṇḍi praśaṣṭeṅ jagat" (68.4a–b) (Old Javanese). Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th Century*, 1:52.

9. "Nahan tattvanikaṅ kamal vidita deniṅ sampradāya sthiti" (68.1a) (Old Javanese). Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th Century*, 1:52.

10. "Ikaṅ vvaṅ rumәṅvī kathā śrī narendra | nda yan tṛpti cittanya membuh kabhaktin | avas pāpakarmanya maryāṅaveśa | ikaṅ duḥkha rogādi māvas vināśa" (49.6) (Old Javanese). Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th Century*, 1:36.

it cause her to bless the welfare of the king's reign."[11] The salutary effects of venerating the royal ancestors are also mentioned in Ratnāṁśa's blessing to Prapañca: "May you find good fortune and increase in learning, which are the fruits of speaking the praises of the supreme ones."[12] This cultural assumption of the ongoing involvement of the dead in the welfare of the living is found throughout the premodern world, and it continues in contemporary Indonesian society.[13] The veneration of ancestors may have strengthened people's belief in the accuracy of traditional knowledge. But even as scholars like Prapañca asserted the stability and veracity of the knowledge they were passing down, the very processes of transmission were causing the historical tradition to change significantly over time.

VARIATION IN HISTORICAL TRADITIONS

Long-lasting traditions exhibit distinctive kinds of variation. When we compare multiple expressions of a single historical tradition that have been recorded at different times, we encounter different versions of the same events, shifts of chronology, and the identities of characters in flux. Variation and transformation are found especially in textual traditions where multiple communicative modes are involved, such as manuscript copying and oral-mnemonic transmission. In the context of medieval French texts, modern scholars have applied the concept of mutability (*mouvance*) to understand how and why variation emerges within traditions.[14] For professional historians, the variation of historical traditions is problematic, because it makes it difficult to use the whole tradition as evidence to produce a coherent and self-consistent historical narrative.

11. "Āstvāṅdadyakəna ry anugrahanire svasthāny adəg śrī narendra" (67.1c) (Old Javanese). Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th Century*, 1:51.

12. "Tuməmvaṅ hita vr̥ddhyani paṇḍitattva, phalaniṅ mucap kasthavan saṅ viśeṣa" (49.7c–d) (Old Javanese). Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th Century*, 1:36.

13. Of particular relevance to premodern Java are the medieval Indian concepts of ancestor veneration, reflected in the adoption of Indian practices such as the *śrāddha* rite. Matthew R. Sayers, *Feeding the Dead: Ancestor Worship in Ancient India* (Oxford University Press, 2013); Henri Chambert-Loir and Anthony Reid, *The Potent Dead: Ancestors, Saints, and Heroes in Contemporary Indonesia* (Routledge, 2002).

14. Roy Rosenstein, "Mouvance," in *Handbook of Medieval Studies: Terms—Methods—Trends*, edited by Albrecht Classen, 3 vols. (De Gruyter, 2010).

The issue of variation is exemplified in the evolution of the Majapahit royal tradition. This historical tradition first emerged at the end of the thirteenth century and was transmitted in manuscript, oral, and performance traditions all the way to present-day Bali. The surviving texts include a corpus of royal inscriptions issued by the Majapahit court in the period 1294–1486 CE, the annals texts *Deśavarṇana* and *Pararaton*, and several heroic biographies of kings and their ministers, such as the *Vijaya and Lawe, Harṣavijaya*, and *Sorāndaka*, many of which we have encountered in previous chapters. The Majapahit royal tradition can be divided into two periods: the early tradition, consisting of texts produced in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (inscriptions and the *Deśavarṇana*), and the late tradition, consisting of texts produced in the sixteenth century onwards (the *Pararaton* and the heroic biographies). The versions of events reported by the early and late traditions differ in fundamental ways, including their chronologies and their reporting of dynastic relationships. The variations are not simply differences of perspective on a shared reality; they involve profound contradictions on important matters of fact. This section delves into how the Majapahit royal tradition evolved over the centuries, with a focus on its chronological and genealogical elements.

There are significant differences between the early and late traditions in the chronology of Vijaya, the first king at Majapahit (r. 1293–1309 CE, according to modern research). The *Deśavarṇana*, representing the early tradition, presents the annals entries shown in table 6 for a series of key events of this period. The charters issued before and after Vijaya's reign are consistent with the *Deśavarṇana*'s chronology. The contents of the Dharmāśraya A inscription (1286 CE) from central Sumatra are consistent with the *Deśavarṇana*'s claim that Kṛtanagara had established his supremacy in that area in 1275 CE.[15] The Gajah Mada B charter (1351 CE) states that "in Śaka 1214 in the month Jyeṣṭha, that was time of the death of his Majesty who passed away to [the abode of] Śiva-Buddha."[16] This places Kṛtanagara's death between May 18 and June 15, 1292, consistent with the *Deśavarṇana*'s entry. The Kudadu inscription, which is the earliest extant inscription issued by

15. N. J. Krom, "Een Sumatraansche inscriptie van koning Kṛtanagara," *Verslagen en Mededeelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen (afdeeling Letterkunde)*, 5e reeks, 2 (1917): 306–39.

16. "I Śaka, 1214, Jyeṣṭamāsa, irika divasani kamoktan, pāduka bhaṭāra saṅ lumah riṅ Śiva-Buddha" (1–2) (Old Javanese). Quoted from a direct reading from a photograph of the Netherlands Indies Archeological Service (OD-741a).

TABLE 6 Annals entries concerning Vijaya's reign in the *Deśavarṇana*

Event	Year (CE)
Expedition to the land of Malayu	1275
Death of King Kṛtanagara	1292
Accession of King Vijaya	1294
Installation of King Jayanagara at Kaḍiri	1295
Death of King Vijaya	1309

Vijaya as king, is dated September 11, 1294, and is thus consistent with the *Deśavarṇana*'s claim that he took the throne sometime in 1294 CE. Chinese records of the time state that the Yuan expedition arrived in Java on March 22, 1293, and returned to China on May 31, 1293, apparently leaving Vijaya in control of Java after that time.[17] Modern scholarship has tended to assume that Vijaya officially acceded as king in 1293 CE immediately after the departure of the Yuan forces. However, there is no evidence to directly contradict the *Deśavarṇana*'s claim that Vijaya became king of Java in 1294 CE, even though this was at least nine months after the Yuan retreat. Based on the evidence currently available, Vijaya's reign may have officially begun at any time between June 1, 1293 and September 10, 1294.

The *Deśavarṇana* states that Vijaya "confirmed his son to be served in Kadiri" in 1295 CE with the royal title Jayanagara.[18] This ceremony, which probably took place in Jayanagara's infancy, confirmed him as the heir apparent to the throne. Jayanagara is mentioned in the Kudadu charter without being associated with Kadiri, while in the Sukhāmṛta charter (1296 CE), he is described as having been "installed at the palace of Daha."[19] This is fully consistent with the *Deśavarṇana*'s entry that Jayanagara's confirmation at the palace of Daha (the capital of the Kadiri region) took place in 1295 CE. An analogous ceremony was conducted by Viṣṇuvardhana in 1254 CE

17. These dates are drawn from Chinese records and a recently published Chinese inscription discovered on Serutu island near Borneo. Hung Hsiao-chun et al., "Mongol Fleet on the Way to Java: First Archaeological Remains from the Karimata Strait in Indonesia," *Archaeological Research in Asia* 29 (2022): 100327, 7.

18. "Mastvakən ātmajanirān sinivīṅ Kaḍintən" (47.2b) (Old Javanese). Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th Century*, 1:35.

19. *Dahanagarapratiṣṭa* (2b.4) (Sanskrit and Old Javanese). Quoted from the edition by Arlo Griffiths and Marine Schoettel (DHARMA).

to confirm his son Kṛtanagara as heir apparent: "Lord Viṣṇu consecrated his son to be served."[20] Similarly, the Mula Malurung charter confirms that Kṛtanagara was being "served in the land of Kadiri" in 1255 CE.[21] From both of these examples, it is clear that the installation of the king's son on the throne of Daha in Kadiri was not a transfer of sovereign power, but simply the confirmation of that son as the heir apparent to the throne. The *Deśavarṇana*'s entry that Vijaya died in 1309 CE is not explicitly corroborated by any inscriptional sources, but it is fully consistent with them. The latest extant charters in Vijaya's name, the Balawi and Warunggahan charters, were both issued on May 24, 1305.

The *Deśavarṇana*'s chronology of the events concerning Vijaya's reign is at least consistent with, if not positively confirmed by, the inscriptional record. We can therefore group the inscriptions together with the *Deśavarṇana* as examples of the early tradition. By contrast, the sixteenth-century *Pararaton*'s chronology of the same events shows significant deviation from this earlier consensus (table 7). According to both the *Deśavarṇana* and the *Pararaton*, the military expedition to the land of Malayu in Sumatra is listed as occurring in 1275 CE. However, the *Pararaton* claims that the death of Kṛtanagara happened immediately after the Malayu expedition, while the *Deśavarṇana* has this royal death occurring seventeen years later in 1292 CE. The *Pararaton*'s link between these two events (the expedition and the king's death) reflects a belief found only in the late tradition: that the departure of the Malayu expedition gave the enemies of Kṛtanagara an opportunity to kill him. The late tradition conflates these two events into a single year, therefore applying the 1275 CE date to both events. This belief is also reflected in the plots of the heroic biographies *Vijaya and Lawe* and *Harṣavijaya*, which belong to the late tradition as well, but it is totally absent from the early tradition texts.

The *Pararaton* agrees with the *Deśavarṇana* in giving 1294 CE as the year of Vijaya's accession to the throne. However, the *Pararaton* states that Vijaya died in 1295 CE (after only a year on the throne), which is inconsistent with the *Deśavarṇana*'s claim that he died in 1309 CE (after a fifteen-year reign). Vijaya's own inscriptions confirm the *Deśavarṇana*'s chronology and contradict the *Pararaton*'s chronology. As mentioned above, the *Deśavarṇana*

20. "Bhaṭāra Viṣṇu aṅabhiṣeka saṅ sūta sivin" (41.3a) (Old Javanese). Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th Century*, 41.

21. "Sinevitaniṅ bhūmi Kaḍiri" (7a.4) (Old Javanese). Quoted from the edition by Eko Bastiawan and Arlo Griffiths (DHARMA).

TABLE 7 Annals entries concerning Vijaya's reign in the *Pararaton*

Event	Year (CE)
Expedition to Malayu and death of King Kṛtanagara	1275
Accession of King Vijaya	1294
Death of King Vijaya	1295

states that Vijaya's son and future successor, Jayanagara, was installed at Kadiri in 1295 CE, a position usually reserved for the heir to the throne. The *Pararaton*'s incorrect claim may be based on a reinterpretation of Jayanagara's installation as heir in 1295 CE as a transfer of full sovereignty. The resulting implication, that Vijaya died and Jayanagara succeeded him in that year, is strengthened from an implicit assumption to an explicit factual statement in the *Pararaton*. This exemplifies how shifting chronologies can result, not necessarily from sloppiness or falsification, but also from the tradition's natural tendency to fill in causal gaps by making explicit those assumptions that were previously only implied by the plot.

The structure of royal genealogies was also transformed as the Majapahit tradition developed. A comparison of the family tree of Vijaya across various texts belonging to the Majapahit royal tradition reveals major differences between the early and late traditions, as well as some minor differences of detail among the three texts within late tradition itself. The genealogy of Vijaya as presented in the *Deśavarṇana* and as corroborated by inscriptions (representing the early tradition) is given in figure 17. The late tradition gives more simplified family trees, in which intermediate generations are omitted (figures 18 and 19). The later sources depict a closer kinship between Kṛtanagara and Vijaya, because they list fewer generations between the pair and their common ancestor. In contrast to the *Deśavarṇana*, all the late tradition texts conflate Vijaya with his father, Lembu Tal, while the *Harṣavijaya* additionally conflates Kṛtanagara with his father, Viṣṇuvardhana.[22]

The fact that the later texts describe fewer generations than the earlier ones can be explained by a loss of information as the historical tradition evolved.

22. The historian Hadi Sidomulyo argued that the personal title Harṣavijaya, as used in the Mula Malurung (1255 CE) and Balawi (1305 CE) inscriptions, may have originally applied to Lembu Tal. In the *Harṣavijaya*, this title is applied to Lembu Tal's son Vijaya because the poet has "apparently confused the father with the son." Sidomulyo, "From Kuṭa Rāja to Singhāsari," 91.

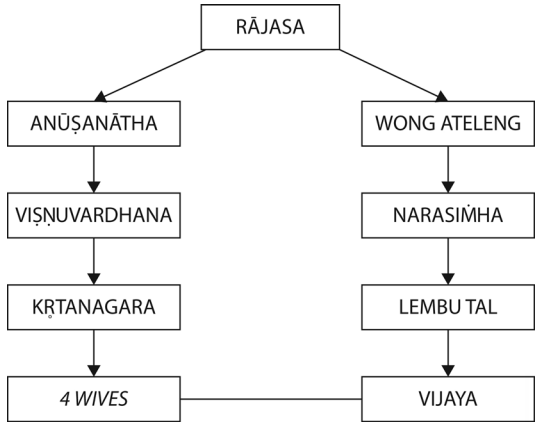


FIGURE 17. Vijaya's ancestry, according to the *Deśavarṇana* and contemporary inscriptions.

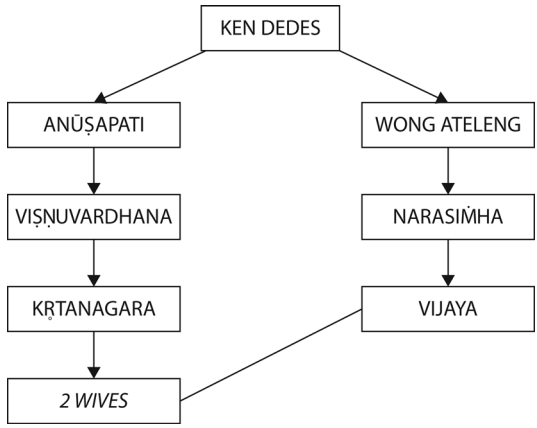


FIGURE 18. Vijaya's ancestry, according to the *Pararaton*.

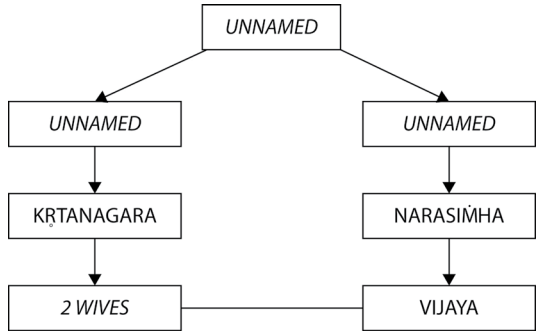


FIGURE 19. Vijaya's ancestry, according to the *Harṣavijaya*.

The name Lembu Tal appears only in the *Deśavarṇana*, which provides no further information about his biography. Similarly, both the *Deśavarṇana* and *Pararaton* furnish only very brief biographies of Viṣṇuvardhana, while the later texts do not mention him at all. Information about these minor figures may have been lost as the historical stories were transmitted between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries. Most of our current knowledge of Viṣṇuvardhana comes from thirteenth-century inscriptions issued during his reign rather than from later manuscript sources. These inscriptions would have been difficult for people in premodern Java to access, and even more so for their successors in Bali, who may have composed the later works in the tradition, such as the *Harṣavijaya* and *Sorāndaka*. A loss of information in transmission, rather than deliberate manipulation of the genealogy, is the more plausible explanation for the gradual simplification of Vijaya's ancestry over time.

Another significant point of contradiction between the early and late Majapahit traditions is the identity of Vijaya's queens. The charters issued in Vijaya's name between 1294 CE and 1305 CE strongly emphasize the importance of his four primary wives by mentioning them at length and giving them elaborate epithets. It is unusual for a king's wives, especially multiple wives, to be included in Old Javanese inscriptions. The reason for the special prominence of Vijaya's queens is that they were all daughters of Kṛtanagara, the powerful king who preceded him (r. 1268–92 CE). Given Vijaya's struggles to maintain the loyalty of his subordinates during his own reign, it seems that his status as the husband of Kṛtanagara's daughters was an important basis for his claim to be the legitimate royal successor.[23]

The early tradition gives a consistent account of the identities of Vijaya's four wives. The Kudadu charter (1294 CE) describes Vijaya as "having union with the daughters of Kṛtanagara."[24] The Sukhāmṛta charter (1296 CE) provides more detail: "All four siblings were his wives . . . all of them daughters of Kṛtanagara."[25] It goes on to name them individually, giving their royal styles (marked by *śrī pāduka*) and their personal titles (marked by *dyah*). These

23. The importance of female dynastic power and matrilineal descent is well known in premodern Java. Barbara Watson Andaya, *The Flaming Womb: Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 170–90.

24. "Kṛtanagaraduhitāsamāgamasampanna" (2a) (Sanskrit). Quoted from the forthcoming edition by Arlo Griffiths and Marine Schoettel (DHARMA).

25. "Sacaturbhrātṛpatnīka" (2a.3); "Samastakṛtanagaraduhitā" (2a.4) (Sanskrit). Quoted from the edition by Arlo Griffiths and Marine Schoettel (DHARMA).

TABLE 8 Identities of Vijaya's queens according to the early Majapahit royal tradition

Birth order	Royal style[a]	Personal title
1st	*śrī pāduka* Parameśvarī	*dyah* Devī Tribhuvaneśvarī
2nd	*śrī pāduka* Mahādevī	*dyah* Devī Narendraduhitā[b]
3rd	*śrī pāduka* Jayendradevī	*dyah* Devī Prajñāpāramitā
4th	*śrī pāduka* Rājapatnī[c]	*dyah* Devī Gāyatrī

[a]For all four queens, the element *pāduka* appears only in the Balawi and Warungguhan inscriptions.

[b]In the *Deśavarṇana*, the elements *devī* and *narendra* are missing from this title, leaving only *dyah* Duhitā.

[c]The Sukhāmṛta inscription gives Rājendradevī for Rājapatnī.

identifications appear consistently, with minor variations, in the Adan-Adan charter (1301 CE), the Balawi charter (1305 CE), and the Warunggahan charter (1305 CE). These charters thus present a fully consistent statement of the identity of Vijaya's queens. The *Desavarṇana* confirms these identifications (table 8), showing that this information was accurately known at the Majapahit court in the mid-fourteenth century.

The late tradition presents a very different picture. In the *Pararaton*, the *Vijaya and Lawe*, and the *Harṣavijaya*, the daughters of Kṛtanagara who marry Vijaya are two rather than four in number. In addition to these two queens from Java, Vijaya takes as secondary wife either one or two princesses from Sumatra. These later texts thus depict Vijaya as having three or four wives: two of local stock, plus one or two of foreign descent. These wives are named differently in each text. In table 9, the first two rows give Kṛtanagara's daughters in birth order, and the second two rows give the Sumatran princesses in birth order. The main difference between the early and late traditions is that in the late tradition, the two middle daughters of Kṛtanagara are absent, and the foreign princesses are prominent. This is probably because no biographical traditions about the middle daughters were preserved, which eventually led to them being forgotten in the historical tradition. Vijaya's father, Lembu Tal, suffered the same oblivion.

The Sumatran princesses, who are important characters in the late tradition texts, do not appear in the early tradition at all. They may have originally belonged to a separate narrative that was later merged into the story of Vijaya's life in the late tradition. Interestingly, the names of the Sumatran princesses are reported consistently in the late tradition texts ("White Lady"

TABLE 9 Identities of Vijaya's queens according to the late Majapahit royal tradition

Queen	*Pararaton*[a]	*Vijaya and Lawe*	*Harṣavijaya*
Older Javanese	"The Older One"	*dyah* Yayestrī	Puṣpavatī
Younger Javanese	"The Younger One"	*dyah* Ratna Sutavān	Puṣparaśmī
Older Sumatran	"White Lady"	"White Lady"	"White Lady"
Younger Sumatran	—	—	"Orange Lady"[b]

[a]In the *Pararaton*, the two daughters of Kṛtanagara are not personally identified but are referred to only as "The Older One" (*saṅ panuha* or *saṅ atuha*) and "The Younger One" (*saṅ anom*).

[b]The names of the Sumatran princesses suggest a symbolic color dualism: "white lady" (*dara pəṭak*) and "orange lady" (*dara jiṅga*).

and "Orange Lady"), but the names of the Javanese queens are inconsistent. This suggests that only the names of the Sumatran characters were preserved in the late tradition. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that the *Pararaton* refers to the Javanese queens anonymously as "the older one" and "the younger one." The other names of the Javanese queens as given in the *Vijaya and Lawe* and *Harṣavijaya* (Yayestrī, Ratna Sutavān, Puṣpavatī, and Puṣparaśmi) are of unknown origin; they may have once belonged to characters from other traditions who later became conflated with Vijaya's queens.

The process of variation within tradition is richly illustrated in the genealogies of Vijaya's children. All the texts of the Majapahit royal tradition depict Vijaya as having three children of note: a son with the royal consecration name Jayanagara and two daughters with the personal names Gitārja and Wiyat. Just as the identity of Vijaya's wives is a point of contradiction between the early and late traditions, so too is the identity of the mothers of Vijaya's children. The most complete statement of this matter in the early tradition is given in the *Deśavarṇana* (47.2–48.1), in which Jayanagara's mother is identified as Indreśvarī, and the mother of both Gitārja and Wiyat is identified as Gāyatrī. In the *Deśavarṇana*, the two daughters are associated with the royal palaces at Kahuripan and Daha respectively, a fact that is confirmed in the Canggu charter (1358 CE). The Adan-Adan (1301 CE) and Warunggahan (1305 CE) charters state that Jayanagara's mother was Parameśvarī, the eldest of Kṛtanagara's four daughters who were married to Vijaya. The name Indreśvarī is a synonymous alternative for Parameśvarī, most likely substituted by the *Deśavarṇana*'s author to better fit the verse meter. The Balawi

charter (1305 CE) alludes to daughters of Vijaya, but the information about them is lost due to a missing plate. As far as we can tell, therefore, the early tradition gives a consistent account of the children's parentage.

The *Pararaton* gives the most complete version of the kinship relations according to the late tradition. Here, Jayanagara's mother is identified as the Sumatran princess known as the "White Lady," while the two daughters are stated to be Jayanagara's "two sisters from (an)other mother(s)"[26] who are unnamed. It is not stated whether the two daughters are of the same or of different mothers from each other, only that they do not share Jayanagara's mother. The *Pararaton* also conflates the two daughters of Kṛtanagara with the two daughters of Vijaya. At one point, Kṛtanagara's daughters (the "older one" and "younger one," discussed previously) are said to have been appointed to the palaces at Kahuripan and Daha, respectively. Later on, however, these palaces are attributed to the two daughters of Vijaya, without any indication of how these positions had passed from Vijaya's wives to his daughters. These children are henceforth referred to by the palace references *bhre* Kahuripan and *bhre* Daha.

The three heroic biographies of the late tradition do not mention Vijaya's children. However, the epilogue to the *Vijaya and Lawe* (canto 14), a late addition to the text that is found in only a handful of manuscripts, contains a radically different depiction of the children. In this passage, each of Kṛtanagara's daughters gives birth to a son by Vijaya; the older *dyah* Yayestrī gives birth to Kudāmṛta, while the younger Ratna Sutavān gives birth to Cakradhara. These names are well known from the *Deśavarṇana* and from the *Pararaton*, in which they are the personal names of the male consorts of Vijaya's daughters. We see here how the names of these two men have shifted from one part of the genealogy to another: in the early tradition, Kudāmṛta and Cakradhara are Vijaya's sons-in-law, but in the *Vijaya and Lawe* epilogue, they are his sons. Jayanagara is depicted as the White Lady's son, hence giving Vijaya three sons, each by a different wife.

The conflicting lists of Vijaya's children are given in table 10, along with their titles followed by their personal names in parentheses if the text includes them. The identities of the three children's mothers are given in table 11. These complex variations are better explained as the result of the loss of information and efforts to compensate for this loss, rather than of

26. "Sanak istrī kālih saos ibu" (27.1) (Middle Javanese). Brandes, *Pararaton*, 1st ed., 27.

TABLE 10 Identities of Vijaya's children across the Majapahit royal tradition

Child	Early tradition	*Pararaton*	*Vijaya and Lawe* epilogue
Son	Jayanagara	Jayanagara (Kalagemet)[a]	Jayanagara (Kalagemet)
Older daughter	*bhre* Kahuripan (Gitārja)	*bhre* Kahuripan	*bhre* Kahuripan (Kudāmṛta)
Younger daughter	*bhre* Daha (Wiyat)	*bhre* Daha	*bhre* Daha (Cakradhara)

[a]The names given outside parentheses are either regnal names, such as Jayanagara, or palace references, such as *bhre* Kahuripan. The names given inside parentheses are the personal names of individuals, such as Kudāmṛta.

TABLE 11 Identities of Vijaya's children's mothers across the Majapahit royal tradition

	Mother		
Child	Early tradition	*Pararaton*	*Vijaya and Lawe* epilogue
Jayanagara	Parameśvarī	"White Lady"	"White Lady"
bhre Kahuripan	Rājapatnī	—	Yayestrī
bhre Daha	Rājapatnī	—	Sutavān

deliberate alterations to the historical account. The titles of all three children are retained across the early and late tradition texts: Jayanagara, *bhre* Kahuripan, and *bhre* Daha. But their personal names vary; the daughter's personal names are lost in the late tradition, while Jayanagara gains a name that is not found in the early tradition: Kalagemet. In the *Vijaya and Lawe* epilogue only, the daughters' names are replaced with those of their husbands, which results in a change of gender, but their titles *bhre* Kahuripan and *bhre* Daha remain constant.

The identities of the children's mothers are affected by the loss of knowledge about Vijaya's wives discussed above. As the names Parameśvarī and Rājapatnī were forgotten in the late tradition, so were their relationships to Vijaya's three children. The *Pararaton* gives no details about the mothers of *bhre* Kahuripan and *bhre* Daha other than the fact that they were not the White Lady, while the *Vijaya and Lawe* epilogue explicitly identifies them as Kṛtanagara's daughters. The parallel structure found in the *Pararaton* (a *bhre* Kahuripan and a *bhre* Daha in each generation) is used in the epilogue to assign identities to the mothers, whose names the *Pararaton* does

TABLE 12 Absolute chronology of rebellions against Majapahit according to the *Pararaton*

Leader of rebellion	Year (CE)
Lawe	1295[10]
Sora	1311
Juru Demung	1313
Gajah Biru	1314
Nambi[b]	1316

[a]This date appears as 1257 Śaka (1331 CE) in the text, but this is an obvious error for 1217 Śaka (1295 CE), which can be seen from the position of the entry within regular order of chronograms in the text. See chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of this error.

[b]The Sukhāmṛta charter (1296 CE) spells this person's name as Tāmbi (meaning "buttress" or "shelter"), while all later sources including the *Deśavarṇana* refer to him as Nambi or Anambi. This later spelling is probably derived from the original name Tambi through application of the active verbal prefix *aṅ-*.

not provide. The highly deviant depiction of Vijaya's children found in the *Vijaya and Lawe* epilogue seems to be the result of its author's attempt to make sense of the deficient information provided by the late tradition.

Not only the genealogies but also the chronologies were affected by divergence between the early and late traditions. An illustrative example of this phenomenon is the chronological shifting in the *Pararaton* of a series of annals entries describing several rebellions against Majapahit authority. The *Pararaton*'s 1295 CE date for Jayanagara's accession to the throne influences its account of the rebellions (table 12). The *Vijaya and Lawe* and *Sorāndaka* describe these rebellions as happening in the reign of Vijaya, while the *Pararaton* alone places them all in the reign of his son Jayanagara. This shows that the *Pararaton*'s order of events is idiosyncratic and does not reflect the late tradition as a whole. Since the *Pararaton*'s plot assumes that the installation of Jayanagara in 1295 CE was a full transfer of sovereignty due to Vijaya's death, the subsequent rebellion of Lawe is perforce allocated to the reign of Jayanagara. This may therefore be an instance where the date of an annals entry (1295 CE) has reshaped the content of the embedded passage (the Lawe rebellion). This differs from the usual situation in the *Pararaton*, where the fragments inserted into the chronicle retain their original wording without being reconciled to the whole.

The conglomerate nature of the *Pararaton* has produced some remarkable internal inconsistencies. These are usually dismissed by scholars as mere chronological error, but they can tell us a great deal about the compilation

processes underpinning the text. The *Pararaton* contains two different types of chronology for the same events: an absolute chronology expressed both in chronograms and in figures, as well as a relative chronology that gives the year intervals between different events. At first glance, the *Pararaton*'s relative chronology seems inconsistent with its absolute chronology. The relative chronology is given in terms of the year interval between two named events (table 13). However, we can make sense of these year intervals if we assume that they have shifted one place down in the order of events that they originally referred to. Table 14 matches the events according to the *Deśavarṇana*'s absolute chronology (given in parentheses) with the shifted intervals from the *Pararaton*'s relative chronology, showing a perfect correspondence.

The chronological shift from the correct year intervals implied in the *Deśavarṇana* and the erroneous year intervals given by the *Pararaton* can be explained by the *Pararaton*'s compilers holding two mistaken beliefs. We have already encountered both of them. First, the compilers believed that the Kṛtanagara died in the same year as the Malayu expedition; the other intervals were therefore shifted to compensate for the missing seventeen-year gap. Second, the fourteen-year interval of Vijaya's reign results from the belief that Vijaya had died in 1295 CE when his son Jayanagara was installed. By correcting for these two errors, all the other year intervals can be made consistent with the early tradition's absolute chronology. It is therefore likely that the *Pararaton*'s relative chronology was originally based on this older absolute chronology, but that it was shifted during the compilation phase of the *Pararaton*'s history to accommodate two incorrect beliefs about the deaths of Kṛtanagara and Vijaya.

The Majapahit royal tradition thus offers three different chronologies for the events of Vijaya's reign: the earlier chronology of the charters and the *Deśavarṇana*, and the two later chronologies (absolute and relative) found in the *Pararaton*. The differences among these chronologies were likely created by later historians trying to make their timelines conform to two beliefs that are found only in the late tradition: first, that the Malayu expedition in 1275 CE was contemporary with Kṛtanagara's death, and second, that Jayanagara's installation at Kadiri in 1295 CE was due to Vijaya's death. Therefore, the differences between the later *Pararaton*'s chronologies and that of the earlier *Deśavarṇana* are not due to random error or arbitrary falsification, but from the compilers' efforts to make their timelines consistent with what they believed to be historical facts.

TABLE 13 Relative chronology of rebellions against Majapahit according to the *Pararaton*

Preceding event	Succeeding event	Interval (years)
Expedition to the land of Malayu	Death of King Kṛtanagara	**0**
Death of King Kṛtanagara	Lawe Rebellion	**17**
Lawe Rebellion	Sora Rebellion	**3**
Accession of King Vijaya	Death of King Vijaya	**14**
Accession of King Jayanagara	Eruption of Lungge	**2**
Sora Rebellion	Juru Demung Rebellion	**2**

TABLE 14 Comparison of absolute chronology in the *Deśavarṇana* (dates in parentheses) with shifted relative chronology in the *Pararaton*

Preceding event	Succeeding event	Interval in the *Pararaton*
Malayu Expedition (1275 CE)	Death of Kṛtanagara (1292 CE)	**17**
Death of Kṛtanagara (1292 CE)	Lawe Rebellion (1295 CE)	**3**
Jayanagara installed at Kadiri (1295 CE)	Death of Vijaya (1309 CE)	**14**
Accession of Jayanagara (1309 CE)	Eruption of Lungge (1311 CE)	**2**
Sora Rebellion (1311 CE)	Juru Demung Rebellion (1313 CE)	**2**

THE MECHANICS OF VARIATION

Variation within textual traditions tends to increase over time, with later texts showing a greater degree of difference from earlier materials and from each other. It does not arise randomly and is not necessarily due to deliberate manipulation. Rather, variation emerges in systematic ways due to the textual modes through which tradition is transmitted. Manuscript copying and compilation, oral-mnemonic transmission, and performance practices all generate their own characteristic types of variation. By examining these mechanics of variation, we can understand how and why texts within a single tradition can differ so drastically. The emergence of different versions of the same events poses a major challenge to the historian, who seeks to construct a coherent historical account out of varying and sometimes conflicting sources.

The variation in the Majapahit royal tradition needs to be explained, because it reveals some important general features of variation in historical traditions. The late tradition shows a greater degree of variation than the early tradition, both internally and relative to the inscriptional record; it is therefore judged by professional historians to be more problematic. Modern scholars have often compared the style of the late tradition texts to medieval European romances, which led them to suppose that the variations among them were due to creative license by their authors. The philologist J. L. A. Brandes suggested that the poet of the *Vijaya and Lawe*, "with a forgivable liberty, also seems to have given free rein to his fantasy."[27] In a similar vein, C. C. Berg, writing of works of the late tradition in general, argued that "we should not be so amazed, when we occasionally notice that the poet deliberately changed the history to obtain a greater romantic effect. . . . We need not think for a moment that, in this manner, the poet perhaps actually represents the tradition of his day."[28]

This hypothesis is not convincing. It stems from a scholarly reluctance to accept the historical practices of premodern Java as legitimately historical. These modern historians dismissed the late tradition works as fantasy because the inconsistencies and contradictions among the different texts are difficult to manage. The logic goes like this: dependable sources ought to present a consistent version of events, but since the late tradition exhibits such great variation from one text to another, these works must be based on creative invention rather than genuine historical tradition. But that is a dubious argument, because it fails to consider the scenario in which these historical traditions convey knowledge of real events but experience variation and diversification over time, leading to inconsistencies. In premodern Java, this latter scenario is far more likely. There is no evidence that poems like the *Vijaya and Lawe* were considered "fantasy" by their authors or their audiences. People in premodern Java took very seriously the need for accuracy in history writing, since telling false stories about ancestors was

27. "Met een te vergeven vrijmoedigheid, ook somwijlen aan zijne phantasie den vrijen loop schijnt te hebben gelaten" (Dutch). Brandes, *Pararaton*, 5* (frontmatter page numbers are set with asterisks in this publication).

28. We moeten ons dus niet verbazen, wanneer we af en toe opmerken, dat de dicther de geschiedenis opzettelijk verandert om een grooter romantisch effect te krijgen. . . . Wij behoeven er geen oogenblik aan te denken, dat de dichter daarbij wellicht inderdaad de traditie van zijn dagen weergeeft" (Dutch). C. C. Berg, "De Middeljavaansche Historische Traditie," PhD diss. (Leiden University, 1927), 8–9.

spiritually dangerous. To "give free rein to fantasy" or "deliberately change the history to obtain a greater romantic effect" would be a very reckless thing to do.

Instead of dismissing these texts as fantasy, we need to understand the mechanics that caused variation within the historical tradition they belong to. In the Majapahit royal tradition, variation came about through three distinct textual processes: the compilation of annals led to chronological conflicts, the process of oral-mnemonic transmission led to genealogical contradictions, and the needs of performance formats led to the rearrangement of episodes within the narratives. Compilers of texts like the *Deśavarṇana* and the *Pararaton* were often trying to reconcile conflicting versions of events. Working decades or even centuries after the events they wrote about, they had very limited access to the durable records of those events that had been dispersed throughout the realm. This meant that the compilers had little basis on which to adjudicate between the conflicting accounts that the tradition had bequeathed to them. Instead, they were forced to resolve those contradictions using historical assumptions that were not always sound. This is illustrated in the above examples of the *Pararaton*'s shifting of Kṛtanagara's death to 1275 CE and Vijaya's death to 1295 CE, so that the chronology of this text would conform to the prevailing beliefs that Kṛtanagara died around the time of the Malayu expedition and that Jayanagara's installation at Kadiri occurred after Vijaya's death. The compilers held this version of events to be true because it was known through a venerated tradition and it could not be proven false by checking the original sources, so they organized the chronology of the *Pararaton* accordingly.

We do not know the full details of the compilation processes that led to the *Pararaton*'s current form, but its structural complexity points to multiple acts of compilation at different times.[29] The presence of both absolute chronologies (expressed in chronograms) and relative chronologies (expressed in year intervals) suggests that at least some of the chronograms may have been calculated on the basis of preexisting year intervals. The assignment of a chronogram for 1275 CE to Kṛtanagara's death may have been based on the following reasoning: the Malayu expedition occurred in 1275 CE, and since Kṛtanagara died in the same year, therefore Kṛtanagara died in 1275 CE too. These chronological shifts in the *Pararaton* were not random or unmotivated. Neither is there any evidence of deliberate falsification of the chronology

29. Sastrawan, "How to Read a Chronicle," 4.

for ulterior motives, such as political bias toward or against certain rulers. Instead, the dating of the deaths of Kṛtanagara to 1275 CE and of Vijaya to 1295 CE follow logically from historical premises that we now know to be incorrect but which were genuinely believed to be true when the chronicle was compiled. This process of adjusting the timeline to accommodate new beliefs is the reason why the chronology of the late tradition's *Pararaton* diverges from that of the early tradition's *Deśavarṇana*.

Contradictions in historical traditions were also shaped by the role of orality and memory in the transmission of knowledge in premodern Java. The exigencies of memorization led to qualitative variation in historical accounts, especially the reorganization of genealogies found in the late tradition. Oral-mnemonic transmission causes narratives to change in characteristic ways, though the extent of these variations depends greatly on the specific details of how these narratives were transmitted. A common type of variation is the loss of details that lack plot relevance, such as names that are not attached to biographical information. This can be seen in examples from the Majapahit royal tradition; for example, Viṣṇuvardhana and Lembu Tal, who are mere names in the *Deśavarṇana* (early tradition), are not mentioned at all in the *Vijaya and Lawe* and *Harṣavijaya* (late tradition). The middle daughters of Kṛtanagara, who are prominent in Vijaya's inscriptions (1294–1305 CE), are completely absent in the late tradition texts, which is probably because these two women ceased to be of political importance after the mid-fourteenth century.

The forgetting of people whose legacy has lost relevance is well documented in a wide variety of oral-mnemonic traditions.[30] Historical knowledge of the middle period between originary times and recent history, which the historian Jan Vansina has termed the "floating gap," is particularly vulnerable to being forgotten.[31] People and events of recent times are often recalled in greater detail, while origin stories are robust because they maintain their relevance to communities throughout generations. We can see how the floating gap works in the Majapahit royal tradition: as the late tradition continued to be transmitted through speech and memory, its middle-period figures like Viṣṇuvardhana became less and less relevant, until they disappeared from the tradition altogether. This was not due to deliberate erasure of these characters

30. Bruce A. Rosenberg, "The Complexity of Oral Tradition," *Oral Tradition* 2 (1987): 79.
31. Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 168.

by later authors; it was a natural consequence of the oral-mnemonic transmission of the tradition.

Historical stories are often performed in theatrical contexts, which bring about their own kinds of textual variation within the tradition. Performance formats produce certain structural variations in the narrative, such as the reordering of episodes and the shifting emphasis of plot and character points. This is demonstrated in the masked theatre of Bali, which includes versions of the Angrok story from the *Pararaton* and the Lawe rebellion story from the *Vijaya and Lawe*. For example, a masked performance in the central Balinese village of Mas in the early twentieth century presented three scenes from the *Pararaton* in a different order from how they appear in the manuscript tradition: first Angrok kills the blacksmith Gandring (the second scene in the text), then he visits his adoptive father Lohgawe (the first scene in the text), and finally he assassinates the ruler Tunggul Ametung (the third scene in the text).[32]

Narrative context is presented differently in written texts and in performance. In the assassination episode mentioned above, the motivation for Angrok's murder of Tunggul Ametung is the fact that the latter's wife Dedes has shining genitalia, which guarantees that whoever is her husband will become the king of Java. In the masked performance, this information is discussed in a casual conversation between two buffoon characters, while in the manuscript version of the *Pararaton*, it is explained in a dialogue between Lohgawe and Angrok. Similarly, in the masked performance, Angrok tells Lohgawe of "his intention of giving his kris to the king's favorite, so that it may appear that he [that is, the favorite] has killed the king."[33] In the manuscript version, Angrok's implementation of the plan is reported by the third-person narrator. These are natural transformations that occur as the historical tradition is realized in the different communicative modes of writing, speech, memory, and performance.

The Lawe rebellion is said to have been a popular subject for both dance theatre and masked performance in the past. Its performance history may go back many hundreds of years; the fifteenth-century Old Sundanese text *Siksa Kandang Karesian* mentions "Rangga Lawe" as the title of a story that

32. Walter Spies and Beryl de Zoete, *Dance and Drama in Bali* (Periplus Editions, 2002), 310–11.

33. Spies and de Zoete, *Dance and Drama in Bali*, 311.

one can learn from a performer.[34] In early twentieth-century Bali, the Lawe story was considered mystically dangerous and was performed only in the context of purification rituals.[35] One would expect similar differences to exist between the written and performed versions of the Lawe story as are found in the Angrok story. The tales of Angrok and Lawe are the best-known parts of the Majapahit royal tradition to be found in the modern Balinese repertoire, though other stories may have been performed in earlier periods.

TRADITION AS HISTORY

Many people in the premodern world gained their knowledge of the past through traditions. History was learned through stories told by elders, by watching theater, and by reading manuscripts that had been copied many times over. This stands in contrast to the professional historian's emphasis on primary source documents as the most reliable and authoritative kind of evidence for what happened in the past. But if we want to understand how premodern societies practiced history, we need to be able to explain the formation and evolution of historical traditions. This chapter has focused on the issue of variation within traditions. The emergence of variation and conflicting versions of events poses a major challenge for the interpretation of historical traditions as evidence.

The main drivers of variation within a historical tradition are the textual modes through which it is transmitted. Different modes of transmission produce distinctive kinds of variation: the compilation of diverse manuscript sources into new conglomerate wholes produces chronological shifts, while oral-mnemonic transmission leads to the simplification of genealogies, and performance traditions bring about the rearrangement of episodes and dialogue. Historical traditions vary naturally over time because they are passed down through the many interwoven modes of communication. A key factor is the loss and inaccessibility of original written documents, because without having them as corroboration, it is very difficult to reconcile or correct

34. "For any kind of story, ask the performers," "Siṅ savatək carita ma, memen taña" (11.12) (Old Sundanese). Quoted from the edition by Aditia Gunawan, *Saṅ Hyaṅ Siksa KandaṅKarəsian: The Holy Precepts of the Hermitage Milieu* (DHARMA).

35. This was the case in the 1930s according to the Dutch administrator C. J. Grader and confirmed by later studies of masked theatre in Bali. Spies and de Zoete, *Dance and Drama in Bali*, 136n1.

diverging versions of events in the tradition. Such variation was not caused by the carelessness of premodern historians but rather by their genuine attempts to study the past using whatever evidence was available. The theory that variation occurs due to the deliberate fictionalization of historical facts is not convincing in the case of premodern Java, and it should not be taken for granted in other premodern contexts.

The question of why historical traditions vary is important, because the profession of history has so far shown little appreciation of variation. When traditions differ significantly from the primary source record, historians have tended to dismiss them as fantasy or fiction, without investigating the reasons why the differences emerged in the first place. But such an investigation is worthwhile, because it allows us to broaden our understanding of how premodern societies have passed on historical knowledge through traditions. It can also help us refine our own methods for interpreting these traditions as sources, because it reveals the systematic changes that historical knowledge tends to undergo in the long term. This may ultimately enable a new set of analytical methods for handling the diverse texts of the premodern world's historical traditions.

Conclusion

WHY DO PEOPLE PRACTICE HISTORY in such different ways around the world? That is the question that inspires this book. The global diversity of historical practice is a fact that all historians encounter once they begin to look beyond the conventions of their own upbringing and training. The more we consider how other people have studied and known about the past, the more diversity and complexity we find. These other ways of comprehending the past can seem strange at times. They do not always fulfill the expectations we have taken for granted, such as how to use primary sources or how to narrate historical accounts. How then are we to respond to the gulf between our expectations of how history should be done and the whole gamut of historical practices that are actually found throughout the world?

A common response is to reject the unfamiliar. The nineteenth-century Scottish scholar John Crawfurd, who served as a colonial administrator in Java, held the view that "the Javanese cannot, in any rational sense of the word, be said to possess any writing deserving the name of history; and no people in such a state of society as theirs ever indeed possessed such."[1] This was not a neutral statement of fact but a condemnation of people in Java for having a backward civilization, one that had not yet achieved the level of scientific rationality possessed by the British. This aversion to unfamiliar ways of doing history was not limited to European colonizers. The eleventh-century Muslim historian Al-Bīrūnī expressed frustration that the Indian sources he used did not fulfill his expectations of what valid historical practice should be like: "Unfortunately, the Hindus do not pay much

1. John Crawfurd, *Descriptive Dictionary of the Indian Islands & Adjacent Countries* (Bradbury & Evans, 1856), 184.

attention to the historical order of things, they are very careless in relating the chronological succession of their kings, and when they are pressed for information and are at a loss, not knowing what to say, they invariably take to tale-telling."[2] Both scholars judged other societies with the chauvinist assumption that their own historical methods were the only valid ones. Their judgments were based on their inadequate understanding of why historical practices develop differently in different contexts. They came up with spurious and prejudiced reasons for dismissing the historical practices of others. These two examples are illustrative of a widespread failure among historians to see that their own methods are only a small part of the vast fabric of the world's historical practices.

This book has sought to explain why historical practices are diverse. Its explanations are grounded in a basic theoretical claim: that historical practices are shaped by how texts are created, preserved, and transmitted in specific contexts. The book emphasizes the materiality and the multimodality of texts. Whether texts survive or perish, how they are woven in writing, speech, and memory, how they are shaped by genre norms, and how they transform over time—all these factors constitute a set of textual conditions within which history is practiced. These conditions vary significantly from place to place, and from time to time, throughout the world. It is the specific combination of factors that shapes the ways that history is practiced in any particular place. The global diversity of historical practice is therefore best understood not in terms of different levels of civilized rationality but as being intimately tied up in the contingencies of textual conditions.

People practice history differently across the world not because they are different people but because they are in different situations. This book eschews explanations of historical practice that treat diversity as an inevitable consequence of fundamental cultural differences. Just as we would not say that there is a uniquely French way of writing history that all French historians exhibit simply by virtue of their national identity, we should not say such things of the Chinese or the Maya or the Javanese. The textual conditions analyzed in the preceding chapters have specific impacts on the practice of history, and none are unique to any particular culture. Focusing on textual conditions offers a powerful way to explain the similarities and differences

2. Edward C. Sachau, ed. and trans., *Alberuni's India: An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India About A.D. 1000*, 2 vols. (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1888), 2:10–11.

among people's ways of engaging with the past, without reducing historical practice to a mere reflection of identity. The contingency of textual conditions, rather than the determining power of culture, is the force that shapes historical practice across the globe.

THE PRECARIOUS PAST IN JAVA

The book's investigation of historical practices has been developed through an in-depth case study of premodern Java. The advantage of this approach is that it allows us to better understand the interrelationships between texts and history through concrete examples. The findings presented here, while grounded in the specific realities of Java, offer a set of general claims that can be tested in other contexts. Wherever the historical practices of another society work differently from those of Java, there is the prospect of a fruitful and respectful conversation about the underlying reasons for those differences. The global diversity of historical practice begins to seem less like a threatening challenge to the discipline and more like an opportunity to explore the rich array of human responses to the past.

People in premodern Java practiced history with the resources available to them. They produced historical records to be consulted in the future, for a variety of legal, political, and religious reasons. Since original documents were so rarely at hand, chroniclers often used manuscript copies, oral traditions, performance narratives, and physical monuments as evidence for what happened in the past. Using this evidence, they studied the past in organized ways that constitute historical practices. These practices were shaped by specific textual genres, such as annals and heroic biographies, which embodied norms and set expectations for how historical knowledge should be expressed. The annals genre encouraged compilers to mix heterogeneous content into a single chronological frame, without imposing uniformity or consistency. The heroic biography genre afforded coherent models of historical explanation and a poetic style in which to narrate the lives of great leaders. These practices of historical writing were driven by the desire to record, study, and explain real events that happened in the past.

People in premodern Java had to grapple with a crucial fact: their past was precarious. Primary source documents, most of which were written on organic materials, were very difficult to preserve in Java's tropical climate. Institutional and political dislocation, especially in the sixteenth century,

resulted in a drastic loss of historical texts. Only a handful of such texts survived in much later manuscript copies. The choice not to adopt advanced printing technologies greatly limited people's capacity to reproduce documents. This made historical traditions far less resilient in the face of disruption than they otherwise would have been. Archival documents on more durable materials, such as metal and stone, were dispersed throughout the countryside, making it difficult for later generations to access a comprehensive range of sources. As a result of all these factors, historians in Java were severely constrained in their access to historical evidence, especially the proximate evidence that modern historians call primary sources.

The ways people in Java responded to these constraints do not necessarily sit well with our expectations of how history should be done. The writers of annals and heroic biographies rarely cited their sources, because in most cases, they could not draw on complete original documents. They more often depended on manuscript copying, oral-mnemonic traditions, performance repertoires, and physical monuments to gain knowledge of the past. These modes of transmission were especially conducive to the emergence of contradiction because over time, they caused historical information to be lost, rearranged, and transformed in characteristic ways. The chronologies and genealogies presented in later historical texts were often inconsistent, both internally and with respect to primary sources. Such contradictions could not be resolved, because there was limited access to the original documents that might adjudicate between them. The inclusion of conflicting annals entries in the *Pararaton* exemplifies this problem particularly well.

The creation, preservation, and transmission of texts in premodern Java produced the distinctive features of its historiography: the heterogeneous content of annals texts, the poetic style of heroic biographies, and the contradictions that emerged among the works of the Majapahit royal tradition. These features have given modern scholars the wrong impression that this historiography is the product of imaginative fiction or a mythical perspective on the past. But the evidence shows that people in Java considered their historical texts to be true accounts of reality, not legend, fantasy, or myth. The crucial factor is that the past was more precarious in Java than in many other places. The features that modern scholars find problematic are better explained by the prevailing textual conditions on the island and by how people living there responded to these conditions. The historical practices of premodern Java can seem to us both familiar and strange. That is because some of these textual conditions apply in our own lives too, while others

are resolutely different from our modern experiences. Our challenge is to respond to this mixture of familiarity and strangeness with a deeper appreciation for the diversity of historical practices throughout the world.

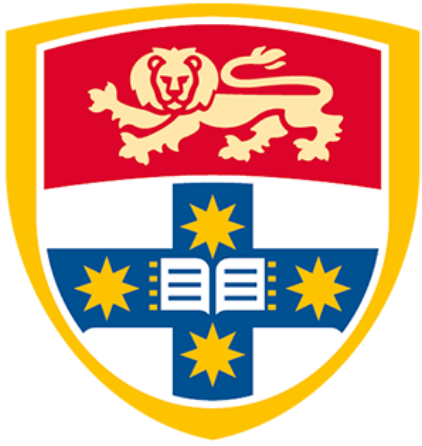
THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL HISTORY

The arguments presented above have global relevance, well beyond the book's case study of premodern Java. Whether we turn our attention to sub-Saharan Africa, pre-Columbian America, or modern Europe, we find that textual conditions powerfully influence the study of the past, the transmission of knowledge, and the writing of historical works. We have thousands of original parchment manuscripts from medieval Europe, but only a handful of manuscripts of a similar age have survived in Java. Historians in imperial China drew heavily on written administrative documents, while Indigenous Australian communities made extensive use of oral-mnemonic traditions to transmit knowledge of the past to future generations. Instead of judging all these practices against a single ideal of what historical practice ought to be, it is far more interesting to investigate how they were shaped by the textual conditions in which they developed.

This perspective on historical practices offers meaningful benefits to the study of global history. It can improve the way we conduct source criticism. The conventional assumptions of the discipline struggle to account for the ways history is practiced beyond Europe and its offshoots. As the geographical scope of global history continues to expand, its practitioners will increasingly depend on sources in non-European languages and from non-Western communities. By better understanding the conditions that shaped these sources, we can gain more profound insight into the historical realities they describe. For example, the conflicting versions of events presented in texts of the Majapahit royal tradition have long perplexed historians. We saw in chapter 5 how these conflicting versions emerged as a natural effect of the oral-mnemonic transmission of the tradition, exacerbated by the efforts of later writers to rationalize their timelines and genealogies. This finding deepens our comprehension of these sources, which are indispensable for the study of Java's history around the turn of the fourteenth century. Similar insights are waiting to be discovered in sources from all over the world that have previously been judged too problematic to be of historical value.

Thinking about how texts shape history can help us resolve the tensions between form and content in historical theory. The book's core argument about the relationship between textual conditions and historical practice offers a new approach to ongoing debates about the distinction between history and literature, the role of language in historical representation, and the influence of narrative form on historical writing. Rather than perceiving the literary turn as a threat to the autonomy of historical method, the book shows how historical practices are grounded in the material realities of the creation, preservation, and transmission of texts. This does not mean dissolving historical research into a subfield of literary criticism or treating historiography as pure discourse with no claim to factual truth, as some have feared. Quite the opposite—it anchors the analysis of historical sources in the concrete facts of their textual conditions. It reveals how the very practices of using evidence, recording facts, and expressing knowledge about the past are, in and of themselves, historically contingent.

This book opens new avenues for asking big questions about how history is practiced around the world. Perhaps the biggest question is about the emergence of historical practice itself. Since contingency plays such a crucial role in how historical practices evolve in various contexts, it stands to reason that the birth of history itself should also be a contingent fact. We no longer need to seek a singular point of origin for historical practice, whether in classical Greece, the Fertile Crescent, or anywhere else in particular. There was no instant of conception that begat the whole kaleidoscope of ways that people have engaged with the past. It was not preordained that humans should begin to think and act historically, to seek evidence for past events, and to wonder about our roles in immense processes that extend far beyond our individual lifetimes. But it just so happens that we did. At its heart, this book is an exploration and a celebration of the astounding diversity of ways that people have known, remembered, and treasured the past, no matter who they are.



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GLOSSARY OF VERNACULAR TERMS USED IN PREMODERN JAVA

BHAṬĀRA, BHRE a lord; a deity or ancestor, (later also) a living royal

DALUANG a cloth made of beaten bark; used for clothing, (later also) for writing

DEŚA a district, usually rural

DHARMA 1. law, duty (as in Sanskrit); 2. a religious foundation, an ancestral shrine

DYAH a personal article; (earlier) for any aristocrat, (later) for a royal princess

GEBANG a *gebang* palm (*Corypha utan*)

JAYAPATTRA a written certificate of a successful outcome in litigation

KAKAWIN a genre of Old Javanese poetry using quantitative meters

KALANGWAN, LANGƏ a poetic aesthetic that is characteristic of Old Javanese literature

KALIYUGA the age of strife, the fourth and worst age (*yuga*) in Indic tradition

KĀVYA a genre of Sanskrit poetry

KAWI 1. a poet (as in Sanskrit *kavi*); 2. poetic language; 3. a modern scholarly term for the distinctive script of premodern Java

KIDUNG a genre of Middle Javanese poetry using rhymed syllabic meters

LONTAR a palmyra palm (*Borassus flabellifer*)

MAHĀRĀJA the paramount sovereign of the kingdom

NAGARA a town, a city, a palace

PAÑJI 1. a type of courtly name used by aristocrats; 2. the protagonist of the Javanese romance story-cycle Panji

PAMƏGAT, SAMGAT an honorific title; (earlier) for a noble lord just below a *rakryān* in status, (later) for a religious official, or a judge

PARWA a genre of Old Javanese prose, drawing on Sanskrit epic and mythological traditions

PATIH the title of chief; (earlier) a village-level administrator, (later) the chief minister of a kingdom

PRABHU a monarch; (later also) the paramount sovereign of the kingdom

PRAŚASTI 1. (in South Asia) a genre of panegyric verse in Sanskrit; 2. (in Java) any official document, often written on durable materials

PU, MPU a personal article; (earlier) for aristocrats, (later) for sages, poets, and smiths

RAKRYĀN, RAKAI the title of lord; for the highest-ranked aristocrats

RATU, ḌATU a king, sometimes subordinate to another

RIPTA leaves used for writing on, usually but not always palm leaf

ṚṆA a debt; in the context of inscriptions, between the donor and beneficiary of a grant

ŚAKAKĀLA, SENGKALA 1. the historical Śaka era that was predominant in pre-modern Southeast Asia, counted from 78 CE; 2. a chronogram representing the digits of a year numeral in symbols; 3. an annals text dated using chronograms; 4. any monument to a historical event, whether dated or not

SAMBANDHA the section of a charter that explains its reasons for being granted

ŚĀSTRA a technical treatise deriving from Sanskrit traditions

SĪMA a benefice, generally productive land with demarcated boundaries, whose economic output is diverted to a specified beneficiary

VIŚUDDHAPATTRA a written certificate of the clearance of debt

WANUA a village; an organized settlement governed by its members, holding rights to the surrounding land

WAYANG traditional theatre in Java, using leather puppets (*wayang kulit*), wooden puppets (*wayang golèk* and *wayang klithik*), human actors (*wayang wong*), or painted scrolls (*wayang bèbèr*)

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